

Peace on earth to those who are God's friends



Dear Friends in Faith and Light,

In a few days we are going to celebrate Christmas. I would like to share some thoughts with you on the occasion of this beautiful feast. At Christmas we recall the birth of a child, born in Bethlehem, a long time ago. At that time some shepherds who were looking after their flocks nearby, heard angels singing, « Glory to God in the highest and peace to those who are God's friends. » Bethlehem was then a small peaceful village. The Romans had imposed peace, the peace of a colonial system, harsh and merciless. Today, 2000 years later, Bethlehem is a town where tensions, fear and bitterness prevail. There is still no peace in the place where the Prince of Peace was born. But on a wider scale, our earth does not live in peace. So what does the angels' message mean?

During our monthly meetings this year we are deepening our understanding of the theme of peace. For peace is missing. Conflicts exist in many places in the world (Central Africa, Iraq, the Philippines, Colombia, Chechnya, etc.). In these different countries, to which unfortunately we have to add many other regions in the world, relationships among people are governed by force and violence. Entire populations are living under terror. All these situations – however far away – affect us, directly or indirectly. Many of our communities live in countries that know no peace.

In other countries, even if there is no armed conflict, there are political tyrannies, and economic powers which impose their own law. In many respects, our world looks like a vast battlefield where interests clash and competition seems to be the only law. Recent incidents in many towns in France demonstrate this, behind the burnt-out cars and broken glass, how can we not detect a socio-economic system that crushes many families and excludes young people?

Likewise in our families and relationships around us, we feel there is no peace. Jealousy, lies, unfaithfulness divide human beings and set them one against the other. Words can be murderous and destroy lives. Gestures can shake to the core and cause so many tears.

Yes, we are missing peace. But in this wounded and divided world, peace is given to us. It is given us in the sign of a newborn baby, Emmanuel, i.e. "God with us." The feast of Christmas invites us to an incredible leap of hope; in contemplating the mystery of Jesus' birth, it is the fragility of love that I am invited to see; a strange fragility that will triumph over violence and evil. Folly in the eyes of men but for God, wisdom! Despite our sinfulness, grace is given to us in this baby; the grace of unconditional love, which nothing can destroy since it has crossed the boundaries of death

Such is the heart of the "Good News" of Christmas: we cannot escape God's love. Nothing, not even our selfishness, our blinkered view, our weakness, our temptations to give in, nothing can separate us from the love of God, displayed in Jesus Christ. Such is the message of the feast of Christmas, a message we are called to welcome, to live and to proclaim. In the midst of all that we can see around us, and even deep in the depths of our being, the love of God hugs us to himself. Whatever may happen, whatever we

may think of others or of ourselves, we can know ourselves as loved, renewed by the grace which comes from God. God meets us just where we are.

Peace is missing. Peace is given to us. Peace will not happen without us. "Blessed are the peacemakers" Jesus proclaims. That is to say, not "blessed are those who like to be left in peace", but "blessed are those who work for peace". At times we certainly feel we are overtaken by events. "That is someone else's job," we think, or "If only they would do something! They'd have to..." But if we dared to begin... For example, we could refuse to do anything, which divides, anything that hurts others; and in this way construct foundations of true tolerance. Yes, we could begin there; at the very start of love of any sort, the minimum needed to live together in our families, our communities, among our neighbours. Moreover, to be tolerant is not to say, "Yes" to everything and anything but to try to understand the other person. To be tolerant, is not to abandon our convictions, nor to say that anything goes, but it is to want to listen to the other. To be tolerant, is not to say that all ideas are to be accepted, but it is always to respect the person who holds the ideas. These little steps are so important.

In our Faith & Light communities this year, we share and discuss about peace. How can we really do this, if our sharing does not overflow into the world outside? Let us begin by little steps, at home with those closest to us. Let us not wait till Peace with a capital "P" becomes present in our world, before we make our contribution. In the place where we are, there we can contribute to the peace that Jesus has come to bring to the world. And by the same token we receive the peace that Jesus comes to bring.

In every Eucharist we give one another the peace of Christ. At this season of Christmas more than on other days of the year, we can share the peace that comes from God, a peace which is transforming the world since it first appeared two thousand years ago, at the birth of Jesus. Let this be our prayer, which rises to God for ourselves, for our communities, for our world:

Give us Lord, the peace that arises from friendship and meeting together

Not the peace of isolation and rejection.

Give us Lord, the peace of the humble and the little ones

Not the peace of the conquerors and the powerful.

Give us Lord, the peace that is the gift of God,

Not the peace that is the product of our selfishness.

I wish you all, members of our communities of Faith & Light, your families and friends, a holy and happy Christmas. May Jesus fill you with His joy and peace!

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