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Blessed are the peacemakers

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Every year on January 1, the world observes New Year's Day, and the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. But for over 50 years, the Church has also called January 1 the World Day of Peace.

This is fitting since it is the octave day of Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. And this year it seems more necessary than ever that we pray faithfully and fervently for the cause of peace in the world. Peace is more than the absence of war. St. Augustine tells us that peace is "the tranquility of order," and the Second Vatican Council teaches that peace is "the work of justice and the effect of charity." Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ.

We desperately need peace at this moment in history. Terrorist attacks around the world and in our own nation have become the new normal. How easy it is to become indifferent to acts of violence and the indiscriminate killing that we see every day in the news. Moreover, in recent months, the threat of war with North Korea has become even greater. Such a war would be unthinkable violent, and yet the danger grows. Other parts of the world are already embroiled in conflict, civil war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

To this darkened and troubled world, our Lord offers the gift of peace. Peace of heart is more than freedom from problems and worry; it actually comes through a right relationship with God. He calls each of us to abide in his peace, and to abide in peace with one another. Jesus entered into this world to reconcile us with God, but also to reconcile us with each other. Each of us, therefore, is called to foster peace through forgiveness, charity, justice, and prayer.

As individuals, we may not be able to bring a halt to the geo-political conflicts of our world, but we can sow seeds of peace in our own personal ways. The well-loved Prayer of St. Francis teaches us how: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

In his annual message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis this year draws our attention to the plight of migrants and refugees. He asks us to look toward the millions who have fled their homes because of warfare, violence and poverty, and who cry out for understanding, compassion, and assistance. Like all of us, they seek only a place where they can live their lives in peace. The massive displacement of peoples might be seen as a threat, but it is also an opportunity to extend hands of welcome and peace to brothers and sisters in the human family. Jesus tells us, "Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did to me."

Prayer for peace need not be limited to places far away and unknown to us. Peace is needed everywhere. We can pray for peace in our own homes, in our workplaces, and in our schools. We can pray for individuals and communities. We can pray for our parishes and diocese, as well as the universal Church. Our prayers can reach wherever peace is most sorely needed.

In a special way, peace is needed in our families too. It seems that families in our time are experiencing greater stresses and challenges, and even the concept of the family has come under fire. Sr. Lucia of Fatima recognized that the "final battleground" between the Lord and Satan would be over marriage and the family. But the Lord has created the family to be the place where peace is taught, learned, and nurtured. Peace in the family is essential for the good of spouses, for the upbringing and protection of children, and for social stability. So, prayer and support for families is most certainly a pathway towards greater peace in Christ.

In his great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Ultimately, lasting peace will only be found in Christ, who calls us to holiness and union with his father. The World Day of Peace occurred on January 1, but prayer and work for peace must be ongoing. In this new year of 2018, let us take time to spend with the one who is the true source of our peace, our healing, and the fulfillment of our deepest desires. May each of us be the peacemakers that Christ calls blessed, and may God bless our world with his gift of enduring peace.