



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Prayers for Peace

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

I recently returned from a 7-day retreat at Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon. During the retreat, the director shared timely insights from a retreat Pope Francis gave in 2006 to Spanish bishops titled, “In Him Alone is Our Hope.” This brings me to a message about a virtue our country and world is sorely lacking today: *peace*.

Like my retreat, our liturgical calendar providentially also has emphasized peace in the past few weeks. The first week of January, we celebrated the Epiphany, a feast recognizing Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who was born into our world to redeem and unify all peoples. A week later, this past Sunday, we celebrated the Lord’s Baptism. With great humility, John the Baptist immersed Jesus in the Jordan River and as he emerged from the waters, the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove. The Father then declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” This same affirmation is declared by God about us when we are baptized, thus beginning our companionship with Jesus, who invites us to follow him in the way of peace born from the Father of Truth.

Sadly, last week, we also saw a violent civil disturbance occur at our nation’s capitol, an event all the more shocking because it took place where laws are established for our country to achieve peace for all Americans. Our form of government is founded on the conviction that respect for the rule of law guards freedom. The American idea of liberty has never been a self-oriented, “I can do whatever I want,” but is intended to be freedom properly rooted in citizens’ interior virtue and expressed on behalf of the common good through external laws.

The Founding Fathers understood that virtue is the cornerstone of a civil society, which is why Thomas Jefferson said, “For people to rule themselves in a republic, they must have virtue.” Once virtue is disregarded, it is easy to cast aside the rule of law, too, and dismiss laws that do not align with our personal worldview or ideology. The common good becomes “might makes right,” and we abandon the most vulnerable among us to serve our own interests or appease the desires of those in power. We are no longer free but become slaves to our desires and to sin. Freedom is not possible without self-restraint and accepting that we have a duty to protect and advance the welfare of others, not just ourselves.

After a year of COVID-19, civil disturbances, and unimaginable political division, many have shared that they struggle to maintain peace in their homes and within their hearts. We must remember that all interior disturbances and social division come from the Evil One, whose plan has always been to “divide and conquer” God’s children to destroy hope and peace. Instead of accepting the world’s solution to our problems--violence--we must recommit ourselves to authentically Catholic pursuit of peace, articulated so beautifully by Pope St. John Paul II:

Opting for peace does not mean a passive acquiescence to evil or compromise of principle. It demands an active struggle against hatred, oppression, and disunity, but not by using methods of violence. Building peace requires creative and courageous action."

I urge the faithful with greater fervor to increase prayers for peace for our nation. I ask each parish to turn to Our Lady, Queen of Peace, by offering a devotional Mass or praying the rosary. It is Mary, patroness of America, who gave birth to the Prince of Peace and will ask her Son to usher in a new era of peace. It is only through staying close to Christ himself that we will encounter the beauty, goodness and truth of the Father and counter the hatred, division, and violence that ravages our nation. As Jesus reminds us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27).

The Prince of Peace is already victorious over evil. With the mighty wind of the Holy Spirit, may he bring holy order and hope to our souls, families, and nation.

In Christ's peace,



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