

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem. Seeing with their own eyes and ears the good news of the birth of Jesus, they went forth and made known the message. We gather in church to listen to the Good News; we receive the Body of Christ to nourish us. And like the shepherds, we are sent forth into the world to share the Good News with others.

The world is hungering for the Good News and yet struggles in a world tainted by sin. I am reminded the lyrics of that song Roy Clark and Buck Owens. “Gloom, despair, and agony on me; Deep, dark depression, excessive misery; If it weren’t for bad luck, I’d have no luck at all; Gloom, despair, and agony on me.”<sup>i</sup> A world without the Good News is indeed a world without hope.

At the dawn of this new year, we turn with hope to Mary the Mother of God. Much more than the shepherds, she is personally aware of Good News ... beginning with the conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. She nurtured Jesus in her womb for nine months before giving birth to him in the manger. She saw him grow and mature to adulthood and exercise the ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the world. In good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, in the joyful mysteries of the Rosary, and the sorrowful agony of his passion, she was a witness to it all.

“He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy” (Lk 1:51-54). Mary never lost hope, she never lost sight that God is in control and carefully guiding the course of history.

Mary is the Mother of God and also the Mother of the Church. She intercedes on our behalf and always reminds us to seek out her Son Jesus through our prayers and our actions. She calls us to listen to him and to follow in his footsteps through lives of sacrifice and service. And she weeps whenever her children struggle with sin and turn from God. Mother Mary is painfully aware of our faults and failings to live as Christ has taught us.

At the dawn of each new year, we turn to Mary in hope and trust as we pray for peace. We are all called to bridge the divide between this world’s futile message of gloom and the Gospel’s eternal message of hope. “All can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations.”<sup>ii</sup>

To build peace we must talk with one another and rebuild trust among generations. “Young people need the wisdom and experience of the elderly, while those who are older need the support, affection, creativity and dynamism of the young... Together, we can learn from one another.”<sup>iii</sup>

Governments must support peace with an investment that turns swords into plowshares. For too long, the priority has been on investing in weapons of war rather than the education of those who can build the bridges for peace.

As a global economy, we all too often invest in technology at the expense of human labor. “It is more urgent than ever to promote, throughout our world, decent and dignified working conditions, oriented to the common good and to the safeguarding of creation. The freedom of entrepreneurial initiatives needs to be ensured and supported; at the same time, efforts must be made to encourage a renewed sense of social responsibility, so that profit will not be the sole guiding criterion.”<sup>iv</sup>

Pope Francis is a man of hope who sees the marvelous potential to build a world that embraces peace: “Let us walk together with courage and creativity on the path of intergenerational dialogue, education, and work. May more and more men and women strive daily, with quiet humility and courage, to be artisans of peace. And may they be ever inspired and accompanied by the blessings of the God of peace!”<sup>v</sup> Like Mary and the shepherds, let us go forth to bring the Good News to the world.

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<sup>i</sup> GLOOM, DESPAIR AND AGONY ON ME from Hee-Haw (1969 -1992).

<sup>ii</sup> Message of Pope Francis for the 55th World Day of Peace.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.