



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The war is over

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His neighbour's joyous cry, "the war is over", and the hug from mamma Regina, so profoundly touched and moved little Jorge Mario that these recollections from Buenos Aires are still very much alive in his memory. At Mass on Thursday, 16 February, Pope Francis observed that "the war is over" is a refrain that should be repeated by every person in order to finally achieve peace in the heart, the family, the neighbourhood, the workplace and elsewhere, until achieved throughout the world. The Pontiff warned that conflicts begin from small things and turn into "arms trafficking", and "school and hospital bombings", all for the attainment of "power" and "one more piece of land". Peace is the work of artisans, he said, and each of us is called to build upon it, day by day, and to invoke it with prayer, which is never a "formality".

From the day's readings, Pope Francis referred to a passage from Genesis (9:1-13) and a passage from Mark (8:27-33). "There are three words, three figures, three images which will help us to reflect, think about and better understand what Jesus explains in the Gospel to his disciples: the image of the dove, the rainbow and the covenant", he noted.

In fact, the Pope explained, "after the flood, the first image is that of the dove which, after circling a few times, returns in the end with a tender olive branch in its beak", and, he continued, "in that

moment, it was thought that the tragedy was over, that the destruction had ended and that peace would return". Indeed, "it is because of this that the olive branch is a symbol of peace; it is God's message to humanity", he explained. God "regretted that destruction and promised not to do it again: 'I want peace', he said". Thus, "this dove is the symbol of what God wanted after the flood: peace, that all men should be at peace", Francis pointed out.

The "second image" is the rainbow, Francis continued. That "rainbow which the Lord Himself creates and says is the symbol of the covenant that He will make: 'This is the sign of the covenant I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign', a remembrance of this peace which shall be a covenant".

"The third word is covenant", the Pontiff continued, stressing that God promises to "never again" destroy. The Pope said that God wanted peace and thus, He made this covenant, a "covenant of peace". And, he added, "Noah made some sacrifices and this pleased the Lord", he added.

"Doves and rainbows are fragile", Pope Francis said, and added "the rainbow is beautiful after a storm, but when a cloud arrives, it disappears: it is an ephemeral symbol". Even "the dove is fragile because all it takes is a bird of prey to fly by". In fact, the Pope recalled, "we saw it two years ago from the window, at Sunday's Angelus when the two children set free two doves: a seagull came and killed them". Thus, "they are fragile symbols". However, "the covenant made by God is strong, but we receive it, we accept it with weakness", he said. "God makes peace with us, but it is not easy to keep peace: it is a job for every day". Because "within us there is still that seed, the original sin, the spirit of Cain, who out of envy, jealousy, greed, and a desire to dominate, makes war, a war which causes the rainbow and the dove to disappear and destroys the covenant with God", he explained.

"There is something about the covenant, a word which keeps coming up: 'blood'", Pope Francis continued. God says, "for your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man". Thus, Francis explained, "we are custodians of our brothers and when blood is spilled there is sin and God will call us to account". Today, Pope Francis said, "there is blood being spilled in the world; today the world is at war, many brothers and sisters are dying, even innocent people because the mighty and powerful want another piece of land; they want another bit of power or they want to earn a bit more money from arms trafficking". But, he continued, "God's word is clear: 'For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man'". Thus, the Pope said, "from us too — it appears that we are at peace, here — the Lord will demand a reckoning of the blood of our brothers and sisters who suffer from war".

In this regard, the Pontiff suggested guidelines for an examination of conscience. "The question I

would ask today is: how do I safeguard the dove?”, he asked. “What do I do to ensure that the rainbow is always a guide, what do I do to ensure that no more blood is spilled in the world?”. It is evident, he added, that “we are all involved in this: prayer for peace is not a formality; working towards peace is not a formality”. Indeed, he said, “war begins in man’s heart; it begins at home, in families, among friends and then goes beyond, to the whole world”. The Pope then returned to a series of questions for personal reflection. “What do I do when I feel that there is something in my heart that is predatory, which wants to destroy peace? Are we sowers of peace in our family, at work, in our neighbourhood?”.

This is a crucial question, the Pope warned, because “war begins here and ends up there”. In fact, “we see the news in newspapers or on television newscasts: many people are dying today, and that seed of war which creates envy, jealousy and greed in my heart is the same one — now a fully grown tree — as the one which causes bombs to fall on a hospital, on a school and kill children, it is the same one!”. Francis exclaimed. Because truly, he continued, “a declaration of war begins here, in each one of us”. Thus the importance of asking ourselves, “how do I safeguard peace in my heart, in my personal life, in my family?”. It is a question of “not only safeguarding peace”, but also of “making [peace] with our hands, handcrafted each day, so that we can do this in the whole world”.

Thus, “the dove, the rainbow, blood”, the Holy Father observed. It “is not necessary to spill our brothers’ blood: only one blood was spilled once and for always, which Jesus talks about in the Gospel”: “the son of man shall be killed”, he explained. It is precisely “the blood of Christ which is the one that creates peace, not the blood which I spill with my brother, my sister or which is spilled by arms traffickers or by the powerful in great wars”, Francis said. “There needs to be peace”, he stressed, adding that “the dove, the rainbow and the covenant of peace” are needed. Within this context, the Pope wished to share a personal memory, “an anecdote which does me good to remember. I was a child; I was five years old and, I remember hearing the fire brigade’s alarm ring, then the newspaper’s and then the city’s”. This, he said, “was done to draw attention to a fact or a tragedy or something else. And immediately I heard my next door neighbour calling my mother: ‘Mrs Regina come, come, come!’. And my mother ran out, somewhat afraid: ‘What happened?’, she asked. And the woman on the other side of the garden was saying: ‘the war is over’ and was crying”, he recalled. “And I saw these two women hugging each other, kissing and crying because the war had ended”, he said.

In conclusion, the Pontiff prayed “that the Lord give us the grace that we may say: ‘the war is over’; that we may shout: ‘the war in my heart is over, the war in my family is over, the war in my neighbourhood is over, war at work is over, war in the world is over’”; that “the dove, the rainbow and the covenant” may be strengthened.
