



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE PAUL VI

FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 1973

PEACE IS POSSIBLE!

You upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility for guiding the vital interests of mankind: statesmen and diplomats; and you, representatives of the nations of the world; men of philosophy, science and letters, industrialists, trade unionists, military men and artists, all you whose work influences the relations among peoples, states, tribes, classes and among the families of the human race; and you, citizens of the world; young people of this rising generation, students, teachers, workers, men and women; you who know what it means to search, to hope, to despair, to suffer; and you who are poor, who are orphans or victims of the hatred, selfishness and injustice that still exist in our world - do not be surprised if again you hear our voice. It is a voice that is weak but yet strong, like the voice of a prophet of the Word standing over us and filling us. We are your advocate who seeks not his own interest, for we are the brother of every man of good will, a Samaritan to whoever is weary and waits for help, a Servant - as we call ourself - of the servants of God, of truth, freedom, justice, development and hope. In the year 1973 we raise our voice to speak to you again of Peace. Yes, of Peace! Do not refuse to listen to us even though Peace is a theme about which you may be fully informed. Our message is as simple as an axiom: peace is possible! A chorus of voices assails us: we know it. Indeed it besets us and stifles us - peace is not just possible, it is real. Peace is already established, we are told. We still must grieve for the numberless victims of war whose blood has stained this century more than all centuries past, this century which is the highpoint of progress; the horrible scars of recent wars and civil strife still mark the faces of our adult generation; and even the still open wounds renew in the limbs of the

new population a shudder of fear at the thought of the mere hypothesis of a new war. But wisdom has finally triumphed; weapons are still and are rusting in the armouries, useless instruments of a madness which has been overcome; worldwide and serious institutions guarantee safety and independence to all; international life is organized by now undisputed documents and instruments which immediately work to solve, through a listing of rights and justice, every possible controversy; dialogue between peoples is continuous and sincere; and, in addition, an immense intertwining of common interests brings about solidarity among peoples. Peace has now come to civilization. Do not disturb that peace, we are told, by calling it into question. We have other new and original questions which need to be treated: peace is a fact, peace is secure; it is no longer a matter for discussion! Really? Would that it were so! But then the voice of these spokesmen of peace, victorious over every contrary reality, becomes more timid and uncertain, and admits that there are truly unfortunate situations here and there, where war continues to rage fiercely even yet. Alas! It is not a question of wars buried in the sands of history; it is a question of wars here and now. Nor is it a question of passing episodes, but of wars which have been going on for years; nor is it a matter of superficial disturbances, because these wars weigh heavily upon the ranks of well-armed men and upon the unarmed masses of the civilian population. Nor are they easy to solve; they have exhausted and rendered impotent all the skills of negotiation and mediation. Nor is the general equilibrium of the world left undisturbed, since they breed an ever growing amount of injured prestige, of unrelenting desire for revenge and of endemic and organized disorder. They are not something that can be ignored, as though they will solve themselves with time, because their poison seeps into souls, corroding humanitarian ideologies, becoming contagious and transmitting itself to the youngest generation and carrying with it a fatal inherited commitment to revenge. Violence becomes fashionable again, and even clothes itself in the breastplate of justice. It becomes a way of life, abetted by all the ingredients of treacherous evil-doing and by all the wiles of cowardice, of extortion and of complicity, and finally presents itself as an apocalyptic spectre armed with the unheard of instruments of murderous destruction. Collective selfishness comes to life again in the family, society, tribe, nation and race. Crime no longer horrifies. Cruelty becomes fatal, like the surgery of hate, declared legal. Genocide is seen as the possible monster of a radical solution. And behind all these horrible visions there grows through cold-blooded and unerring calculations the huge economy of arms, with its hunger-producing markets. And so politics resumes its unrenounceable programme of power. And peace? Yes, peace! Peace, it is said, can survive equally in and to some extent exist side by side with the most unfavourable conditions of the world. Even in the frontline trenches, or in the lulls in warfare or amid the ruins of all normal order there are quiet corners, quiet moments. Peace immediately adapts itself to them and, in its own way, flourishes. But is this vestige of vitality, which we can speak of as true peace, mankind's ideal? Is it this modest and wonderful capacity for recovery and resistance, this desperate optimism that can slake man's supreme aspiration to order and the fullness of justice? Shall we give the name of peace to its counterfeits? *Ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant* (Tacitus). Or shall we give the name of peace to a truce, to a mere laying down of arms, to an arrogant exercise of power beyond revoke, to an external order based on violence and fear, or to a temporary balance of opposed forces, to a trial of strength consisting in the immobile tension of

rival powers? This would be a necessary hypocrisy, with which history is filled. It is certainly true that many things can prosper peacefully even in precarious and unjust situations. We must be realistic, say the opportunists; the only possible kind of peace is this: a compromise, a fragile and partial settlement. Men, they say, are incapable of a better sort of peace. And so, at the end of the twentieth century, will mankind have to be content with a peace deriving from a diplomatic balance and from a certain regulation of rival interests, and nothing more? We admit that a perfect and stable *tranquillitas ordinis*, that is, an absolute and definitive peace among men - even if they have progressed to a universal high level of civilization - can only be a dream, not vain, but unfulfilled, an ideal, not unreal but still to be realized. This is so because everything in the course of history is subject to change, and because the perfection of man is neither univocal nor fixed. Human passions do not die. Selfishness is an evil root that can never be completely removed from man's psychology. In the psychology of whole peoples this evil commonly takes on the form and power of a *raison d'être*. It acts as a philosophy of ideals. For this reason we are menaced by a doubt, a doubt that could be fatal: is peace ever possible? And in the minds of some this doubt very easily changes into a disastrous certainty: peace is impossible! A new, indeed an ancient anthropology arises: man is made to fight against man: *homo homini lupus*. War is inevitable. The arms race - how can it be avoided? It is a basic political necessity. And then it is a law of the international economy. It is a question of prestige. First the sword, then the plough. It seems as though this conviction prevails over every other, even for some developing peoples, which are struggling to enter into modern civilization, which are imposing upon themselves enormous sacrifices in the resources essential for life's basic needs, cutting down on food, medicine, education, road-building, housing and even sacrificing true economic and political independence, so that they can be armed and can inflict fear and slavery on their own neighbours, often with no more thought of offering friendship, cooperation, a common well-being, but showing a grim face of superiority in the art of offence and war. Peace, many people believe and say, is impossible, either as an ideal or as a reality. Here on the contrary is our message, your message too, men of good will, the message of all mankind: peace is possible! It must be possible! Yes, because this is the message that rises from the battlefields of the two world wars and the other recent armed conflicts by which the earth has been stained with blood. It is the mysterious and frightening voice of the fallen and of the victims of past conflicts; it is the pitiable groan of the unnumbered graves in the military cemeteries and of the monuments dedicated to the Unknown Soldiers: peace, peace, not war. Peace is the necessary condition and the summing up of human society. Yes, because peace has conquered the ideologies that oppose it. Peace is above all a state of mind. Peace has at last penetrated as a logical human need into the minds of many people, and especially of the young. It must be possible, they say, to live without hating and without killing. A new and universal pedagogy is gaining ascendancy - that of peace. Yes, because the maturity of civilized wisdom has expressed this obvious fact: instead of seeking the solution to human rivalries in the irrational and barbarous test of blind and murderous strength in arms, we shall build up new institutions, in which discussion, justice and right may be expressed and become a strict and peaceful law governing international relations. These institutions, and first among them the United Nations Organization, have been established. A new humanism supports them and holds them in honour. A solemn

obligation unites their members. A positive and worldwide hope recognizes them as instruments of international order, of solidarity and of brotherhood among the peoples. In these institutions peace finds its own home and its own workshop. Yes, we repeat that peace is possible, since in these institutions it finds again its fundamental characteristics, which a wrong idea of peace easily makes one forget. Peace must be based on reason not passion; it must be magnanimous, not selfish. Peace must be not inert and passive but dynamic, active and progressive according as the just demands of the declared and equitable rights of man require new and better expressions of peace. Peace must not be weak, inefficient and servile, but strong in the moral reasons that justify it and in the solid support of the nations which must uphold it. There follows an extremely important and delicate point: if these modern organizations which are to promote and protect peace were not fit for their specific function, what would be the fate of the world? If their inefficiency were to cause fatal disillusionment in the minds of men, peace would thereby be defeated, and with it the progress of civilization. Our hope and our conviction that peace is possible would be stifled, first by doubt, then by mockery and scepticism, and in the end by denial. And what an end this would be! One shrinks from thinking of such a downfall. It is necessary to repeat once more the basic statement that peace is possible, in these two complementary affirmations: Peace is possible, if it is truly willed; and If peace is possible, it is a duty. This involves discovering what moral forces are necessary for resolving positively the problem of peace. It is necessary to have - as we said on another occasion - the courage of peace. Courage of highest quality: not that of brute force, but that of love. We repeat: every man is my brother; there cannot be peace without a new justice. Men of strength and conscience, who through your collaboration have the power and duty to build and defend peace; you especially who are leaders and teachers of peoples: if ever the echo of this heartfelt message reaches your ears, may it enter also into your hearts and strengthen your consciences with the renewed certainty that peace is possible. Have the wisdom to fix your attention on this paradoxical certitude; devote your energy to it and, in spite of everything, give it your trust; with your powers of persuasion make it a theme for public opinion, not in order to weaken the spirits of the young but to strengthen them to more human and virile sentiments. Establish and build up in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom peace for the coming centuries; beginning with the year 1973, vindicate its possibility by accepting its reality. This was the programme which our predecessor John XXIII traced out in his Encyclical "*Pacem in Terris*," the tenth anniversary of which will fall in April 1973. And just as ten years ago you listened with respect and gratitude to his paternal voice, so we trust that the memory of that great flame which he kindled in the world will strengthen hearts to new and firmer resolutions for peace. We are with you. To you, brothers and sons and daughters in the Catholic communion, and to all united with us in the Christian faith, we extend once more the invitation to reflect upon the possibility of peace. We do this by indicating the way in which such reflection can be greatly deepened: through a realistic knowledge of anthropology, in which the mysterious causes of evil and good in history and in man's heart reveal to us why peace is always an open problem, always threatened by pessimistic solutions and at the same time always encouraged not only by the obligation but also by the hope of happy solutions. We believe in the real, though often hidden sway of an infinite Goodness, which we call Providence and which rules over the destinies of humanity; we know the

strange but tremendous reversibility of every human situation in a history of salvation;(1) we bear engraved upon our memories the seventh beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount: "Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God;" (2) absorbed in a hope that does not deceive,(3) we hear the Christmas proclamation of peace for men of good will;(4) we have peace ever upon our lips and in our hearts as a gift and greeting and a biblical wish deriving from the Spirit, for we possess the secret and unfailing fount of peace, which is "Christ our peace." (5) And if peace exists in Christ and through Christ, it is a possibility among men and for men. Let us not allow the idea of peace to perish, nor the hope of peace, nor the aspiration towards it, nor the experience of it; but let us renew the desire for peace in men's hearts, at all levels: in the inmost sanctuary of consciences, in family life, in the dialectic of social conflicts, in relations between classes and nations, in the support of initiatives and international institutions that have peace as their banner. Let us make peace possible by preaching friendship and practising love of neighbour, justice and Christian forgiveness; where peace has been cast out let us open the door to it through honest negotiations brought to a sincere and positive conclusion; let us not refuse any sacrifice which, without offending the dignity of any generous person, will make peace quicker, more heartfelt and more lasting. To the tragic and insuperable contradictions that seem to make up the grim reality of history in our day, to the attractions of aggressive force, to the blind violence that strikes the innocent, to the hidden snares that work to speculate on the big business of war and to oppress and enslave the weaker nations, to the anguished question, finally, that ever besets us : is peace ever possible among men? true peace? - to this question there springs from our heart, filled with faith and strong with love, the simple and victorious response: Yes! It is a response that impels us to be peacemakers, with sacrifice, with sincere and persevering love for mankind. Let this be an echo to our response, carrying with it blessings and good wishes in the name of Christ: Yes! *From the Vatican, 8 December 1972.*

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(1) Cf. *Rom* 8:28.(2) *Mt* 5: 9.(3) Cf. *Rom* 5:5.(4) Cf. *Lk* 2:14.(5) *Eph* 2:14.