

The Church's mission
30 years after *Ecclesia in Africa*¹
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Over 30 years ago, Pope St John Paul II published *Ecclesia in Africa*, the fruit of a truly synodal process throughout the continent and in Rome. One sentence sums up our challenge today: “The Church as the Family of God in Africa must bear witness to Christ also by promoting justice and peace on the Continent and throughout the world.”³ In order to face this great challenge, we need to realize that the horizon of our mission must not stop short of love: our desire for peace begins with the quest for justice, but it must extend beyond justice, to find its accomplishment in charity, that supernatural gift of love that comes from God and leads to God. From this perspective, our mission needs both courage and solidarity.

“During our pilgrimage on this earth,” says Pope Leo XIV, “peacemaking requires humility and courage. The humility to live truthfully and the courage to forgive.”⁴

Let me offer a meditation, guided by St. Augustine, on the courage of peace rooted in Christian solidarity throughout Africa. (1) Solidarity begins by courageously recognizing the universal desire for happiness, and (2) by pursuing the right love of charity; (3) it is multiplied in imitating the humility of Christ, the Prince of Peace; (4) it is sustained in the Eucharist as the universal sacrament of peace; and (5) it is unafraid of the hiddenness in which love often operates.

I. The courage to start from the universal desire for happiness

In the *City of God*, Augustine develops his sophisticated account of peace. It begins with joy. Within all human beings is a universal desire for happiness – not just any type, but an unshakable and lasting happiness “which remains forever and cannot be taken away by ruthless fortune.”⁵ In fact, those who desire “what is perishable

¹ An earlier version of this text, co-authored with Mr. Luca Colacino, was published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, January 2026.

² Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican.

³ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Yaoundé, 14 September 1995. Henceforth (EA).

⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, Hall of Benediction, 9 January 2026.

⁵ Augustine, *De beata vita*, 2, 11.

and fleeting” are subject to the fear of losing what they love and therefore cannot be happy, since those who fear cannot be happy.⁶

The universal desire for true and lasting joy leads Augustine to identify the longing for happiness with the longing for peace, especially that “eternal peace which no adversary can disturb.”⁷ He famously defines peace as “the tranquillity of order” in which all things are in harmony, precisely because harmony entails stability, and the true source of happiness is the stable possession of all the goods desired. “Just as there is no one who does not wish to be joyful, so there is no one who does not wish to have peace.”⁸ Even those who wage war desire peace, but they want it their *own* way.

This is the starting point for authentic Christian solidarity. Everyone wants to live, enjoy and preserve happiness in conditions of peace.⁹ As universal, peace is an indivisible good, according to St. John Paul II:

[I]n a world divided and beset by every type of conflict, the conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane. Today, perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together....¹⁰

So, peace is either everyone’s or no one’s. One person’s lack of peace necessarily damages peace for all, and “all” means all the dimensions that constitutes being fully human. *Ecclersia in Africa* teaches: Integral human development — the development of every person and of the whole person, especially of the poorest and most neglected in the community — must also be the goal of peace-making. It is at the very heart of evangelization (EA 68). Thus, the liberation that evangelization proclaims “cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the Divine Absolute” (EA 68).

Although we experience a great deal of interdependence, the challenge remains to agree on a common destiny to desire and pursue together. Solidarity, then, must begin with appreciating the common vocation of all human beings to true and lasting happiness. Whether or not all agree that this longing is satisfied only in the One

⁶ Augustine, *De beata vita*, 2, 11.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 10.

⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 11.

⁹ Our Dicastery associates these desires with integral human development, life to the full.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 26.

whom Augustine calls “the God of my joy”, everyone’s common desire for that happiness must be respected. This is our point of contact with everyone, including those furthest away and different from us. Our common desire for happiness is the first step into a dialogue where we *can* recognize the hope of fraternity even with our fiercest enemies.

Joy, then, can be the cornerstone on which to build a culture able to resist the ruthless logic of conflict and war. No conflict or war can extinguish peoples’ common desire for true happiness; therefore, no conflict or war can extinguish all points of contact between enemies. Their common desire for happiness is where to begin to see each other’s viewpoints and open up to dialogue towards forgiveness and reconciliation. A logic of peace takes their respective desires into account but also their mutual dependency and need for solidarity. “Those who seek solutions in war,” says Pope Francis, are “frequently fuelled by a breakdown in relations, hegemonic ambitions, abuses of power, fear of others and a tendency to see diversity as an obstacle.”¹¹

For Augustine, therefore, joy is not a subjective emotional state as much as straining towards an ultimate good that is also a common good because it *can and should* be shared by all, if it is to be enjoyed at all.

Vatican II guided our contemporary appreciation of the extraordinary dignity of being human that is also shared by all. The implication is utterly concrete: “people should not live in sub-human social, economic, cultural and political conditions. This is the theological foundation of the struggle for the defence of personal dignity, for justice and social peace, for the promotion, liberation and integral human development of all people and of every individual” (EA 69). St Paul VI tied these elements together with his incisive declaration: “The new name for peace is development” (128). It can thus rightly be stated that “integral development implies respect for human dignity and this can only be achieved in justice and peace” (EA 69). Further, “the development of every person and of the whole person, considered not only individually but also and especially in the context of the common and harmonious development of all the members of a nation and of all the peoples of the world” (EA 70)

By urging us to recognize our universal desire for happiness, Augustine helps us think how to build peace on the path of solidarity, while also promoting Christian

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 256, quoting “Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil, but those who counsel peace have joy” (Prov 12:20).

courage oriented towards the true and ultimate joy that endures beyond earthly goods.

II. The courage to pursue the right love

The path to peace surely requires courage; yet for Augustine, the courage of peace is ultimately courage to pursue a right love. Human beings are moved by their loves: we form our intentions and perform our actions based on what we love. The diversity of interests and actions in people all boils down to two types of love: “a love of self-extending to contempt of God” (which he calls *cupiditas*) and a “love of God extending to love of self” (which he calls *caritas*).¹² Each type of love leads to a different quality of peace.

The love of self is based on a logic of personal interests. This keeps us from recognizing our interdependence and the need of solidarity for lasting happiness; it inevitably leads to conflicts of interest among different parties. In this context, ‘peace’ becomes merely the absence of conflict, and ‘courage’ easily becomes the ‘courage’ to affirm one’s will over that of others. Such logic leads to policies of mutual non-aggression and mutual assured destruction. In both cases, peace is reduced to a fragile stability born of fear, like those, says Augustine, who “make a wilderness and call it peace.”¹³

The love of self leads to the wilderness of isolation, trapping people and nations in logics of hostility and domination. The ‘peace’ which flows from love of self falls short not only of the Gospel of Christ but also of the light of reason. Such so-called ‘love’ is closed off to transcendence and leads all too easily to deadly combat. Therefore, while war is content with destruction, peace requires continuous and patient efforts of construction as well as constant vigilance.¹⁴ In fact, “the great spiritual traditions, as well as right reason, teach us to look beyond blood ties or ethnicity [or tribalism], beyond associations that accept only those who are similar and reject those who are different.”¹⁵

The love of God, instead, is capable of bringing about a peace that more closely follows the light of reason, exceeds human resources and transcends the individual; it subsumes the conflicts of opposing private interests in harmonious obedience to God’s will; it integrates the quest for peace with a “love of justice”;¹⁶ it strives for

¹² Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 28, 632.

¹³ Tacitus, *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus*, trans. R.B. Townshend (London: Methuen & Co., 1894), 34.

¹⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, Hall of Benediction, 9 January 2026.

¹⁵ Leo XIV, *Address to the Participants in the 3rd World Meeting on Human Fraternity*, 12 September 2025.

¹⁶ Leo XIII, *Nostris errorem*, 107.

the integral human development of life that flourishes as fully as possible for all. Because it is impartial and unrestricted, true justice establishes harmonious order and stability and thus ensures lasting peace. In contrast, Augustine says, “the peace of the unjust is not worthy to be called peace at all.”¹⁷ He praises those who love God for being “the companions in eternal peace, among whom there is no love of a will that is personal and so to speak, private, but a love that rejoices in a common and immutable good: a love that makes one heart out of many because it is the perfectly concordant obedience to charity.”¹⁸ Charity, thanks to Christian solidarity, make one heart out of many.

Augustine is chiefly interested in the question of just peace. He acknowledges the possibility of just wars only as a sad and unfortunate necessity to correct the ills of an unjust peace. Rather than defining criteria that make a war ‘just’, he wants to make sure that the end of the just war is charity, and that the reluctant decision to wage a just war is also rooted in charity, not hatred or vengeance. For Augustine, just war is not a cold philosophical justification of political games; rather, it is a miserable necessity contrary to the human horizon of solidarity.

In the face of this dilemma, Augustine remains torn:

[T]he wise man, they say, will wage just wars. Surely, however, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will be much readier to deplore the fact that he is under the necessity of waging even just wars. [...] Let everyone who reflects with pain upon such great evils, upon such horror and cruelty, acknowledge that this is misery. And if anyone either endures them or thinks of them without anguish of soul, his condition is still more miserable: for he thinks himself happy only because he has lost all human feeling.¹⁹

The courage needed for building lasting peace, therefore, is born in charity. For this very reason, it is also the courage to start from oneself. In one of his sermons, Augustine declared: “If you wish to draw others to peace, first have it yourselves; be steadfast in peace yourselves. To inflame others, you must have the flame burning within.”²⁰

When we recognize that peace requires a harmonious obedience to God’s will, we must also admit the weakness of *our* will in conforming to God’s. We often fail to want what we know is both right and good for us. The courage of peace is the

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 12, 936.

¹⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XV, 3, 638.

¹⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 7.

²⁰ Augustine, *Sermon* 357, 3.

courage of “returning to the heart” where truth sheds light on our natural desire for peace built on charity, and on the weakness of our will before the calling of charity.

But if we deny or forsake our vocation and yearning for shared happiness and true peace, we fear others, dehumanizing them and making an enemy of them. If we neglect or deny our capacity to exercise the charity that sustains lasting peace, we fear ourselves, dehumanizing ourselves, closing us into ourselves, our interests, our wants, or into self-pity over our weakness and moral failure. In these conditions, fear stands as the utmost hindrance to the pursuit of that peace in which there is “one heart out of many”.

The courage of peace comes from Christ. His grace alone rescues us from despairing over our moral weakness. His word alone calls us to love our enemies. Fear is reasonable in front of the real danger of conflict and the real weakness of our will. But the courage of peace requires us to desire peace even when it is frustrated by real dangers and by our own weakness. The pursuit of peace is difficult to choose but “the courage to choose comes from love, which God shows us in Christ.”²¹

Christ’s love brings us out of our weakness into a love that is capable of making a friend of our enemy. This is “the perfect love that casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). Facing our inability to become perfect *lovers* capable of building a lasting peace, Augustine shows that human perfection is learning how to become perfectly *beloved*. Thus, at every Mass, we pray: “Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church.” The courage to receive Christ’s love in faith, despite our weakness, opens up the horizon of true peace, not built on fear and power, but humility and self-giving love. “It is the peace of the risen Christ,” said Pope Leo from the balcony of St Peter’s, “a peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally.”²²

III. The courage to imitate Christ, the Prince of Peace

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, become imitators of Christ’s love! Become the yeast of charity in the world and so proceed towards true peace. Your imitation of Christ touches people’s hearts and draws them closer to God. The *Confessions* bear witness to the attractive, transforming beauty of those who imitate Christ.

Yet, Augustine never forgets the weakness of human wills and the limits of human efforts alone. True peace starts with the mystery of grace, by which “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us” (Rm 5:5). “Let

²¹ Leo XIV, *Dialogue with young people during the Jubilee Vigil*, Tor Vergata, 2 August 2025.

²² Leo XIV, *First Blessing “Urbi et Orbi”*, Central Loggia of the Vatican Basilica, 8 May 2025.

us ask from the Holy Spirit the gift of peace,” Pope Leo said on Pentecost. “First of all, peace in our hearts, for only a peaceful heart can spread peace in the family, society and international relations.”²³

The courage of peace, then, is to allow God’s love to build peace through our lives, one heart at a time. It is a work of divine grace and human cooperation. “Peace begins with each one of us,” Pope Leo said, “in the way we look at others, listen to others and speak about others... The way we communicate is of fundamental importance: we must say ‘no’ to the war of words and images, we must reject the paradigm of war.”²⁴ Our lives make God’s invisible grace visible.

To resist the logics of war is to offer examples of peace as alternative models for all, particularly the young: “Amid wars, terrorism, human trafficking and widespread aggression, our children and young people need to be able to experience the culture of life, dialogue, and mutual respect. Above all, they need the witness of men and women who embody a different and non-violent way of living.”²⁵

Begin with the family. Just peace in the public sphere is modelled on ordered harmony in the household, where “even those who command are servants of those whom they seem to command; for it is not out of any desire for mastery that they command; rather, they do so from a dutiful concern for others: not out of pride in ruling.”²⁶ In family, people learn that harmony among discordant wills is only achieved in the order of love where, for the sake of the common good, the desires of others are preferred to one’s own.

Accordingly, “the Lord sends us into the world to bring his same gift: ‘Peace be with you!’ and to become its creators in everyday life.” Pope Leo is “thinking of parishes, neighbourhoods, areas within the country, the urban and existential peripheries. There, where human and social relationships become difficult and conflict takes shape, perhaps subtly, a Church capable of reconciliation must make herself visible [and] promote pathways of education in non-violence, mediation initiatives in local conflicts, and welcoming projects that transform fear of the other into an opportunity for encounter.”²⁷

So, “*if you want peace, prepare institutions of peace.*” This, Pope Leo clarifies, “cannot simply involve political institutions, whether national or international, but requires

²³ Leo XIV, *Solemnity of Pentecost*, Regina Caeli, St Peter's Square, 8 June 2025.

²⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to representatives of the media*, Audience Hall, 12 May 2025.

²⁵ Leo XIV, *Address to the movements and associations of the “Arena of Peace”*, Clementine Hall, 30 May 2025.

²⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 14.

²⁷ Leo XIV, *Address to the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 17 June 2025.

all institutions – educational, economic and social”.²⁸ Peace requires a new mindset of solidarity, “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good,” as St John Paul II said.²⁹

Pope Francis frequently spoke of the need to pass from “I” to “we” even at the level of institutions, at the level of culture: “The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”³⁰ The essence of that solidarity which shapes lasting peace is found, then, in the imitation of Christ’s love. Using our example, He can transform families, communities, institutions and nations – one heart at a time.

IV. The courage to participate in Christ’s sacrifice as the universal sacrament of peace

For us Christians, the courage of peace is rooted above all in our communion with the Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In Book X of *City of God*, Augustine explains that, since justice is to give to each what is due, a society can only fulfil the demands of justice by giving to God what is due to God. But what is due to God is infinite, and we are only finite beings. Thus, Christ, the God-man, is the only one capable of fulfilling the demands of divine justice. Hence, the justice which peace demands cannot be acquired by our own strength, but requires our participation in Christ’s sacrifice, accomplished once and for all on the Cross and celebrated by the Church daily “in the sacrament of the altar.”³¹

Augustine does not dream of establishing heavenly peace on earth. Deeply aware of the reality of human weakness, he turns to the justice inaugurated by Christ in his earthly life which continues through his sacramental presence in the Church. This is how to strive for earthly peace, and why we can expect it, imperfect though it may be. It is for us to take up the cause: “through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes she can contribute greatly towards making the family of man and its history more human” (EA 68) and more peaceful.

²⁸ Leo XIV, *Address of his holiness Pope Leo XIV to the movements and associations of the “Arena of Peace”*, Clementine Hall, 30 May 2025.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38.

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 188.

³¹ Augustine, *City of God*, X, 6. The Church demonstrates that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.

“Throughout the world, it is to be hoped that ‘every community become a *house of peace*, where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished’.”³²

In the face of our enemies and of our own weak wills, Christ shows that justice is accomplished in humility, serving in love not conquering by force. He promises to strengthen us to persevere in charity, even when it gets costly, since the goods of charity cannot be taken away by death. Courage is “the love which dreads no hardship, not even death.”³³ Such courage, oriented to supernatural goods, can only be from God.

The Church, gathered by the Sacrament of the Altar in one body, enjoying a harmonious order of individual wills, united by one love, is the most wonderful realization of God’s peace among us, and also the most powerful witness to the world about the possibility of real peace, fraternity and solidarity. Such peace is enjoyed only by the sacrifices we make daily, the sacrifices of charity: “It is we ourselves, His own City, who are His most wonderful and best sacrifice.”³⁴ Real courage is to remain united in Christ as one body. For in the Eucharist, *by grace*, we become what we consume: a sacrament of peace.

Jesus Christ, St. Paul wrote, “is our peace; in his flesh he has made two groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14). By contrast, Augustine asks: “How then are you peace-makers, if, when Christ makes one of two, you make two of one?”³⁵ “Peace is not merely a human achievement, but a sign of the Lord’s presence with us,”³⁶ attained in the mystery of Christ’s flesh, where we who are many become one.³⁷

V. Conclusion: The courage to follow the hidden path of charity building peace

Finally, the courage of peace is being unafraid of operating in the hiddenness of charity, where no one seems to see, or record, or document. It requires presence, more than theories; concrete gestures, more than words; following Christ even when no one else sees our costs and sufferings. Courage, this quiet perseverance in charity,

³² Leo XIV *Address to the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 17 June 2025.

³³ Augustine, *De Musica*, VI, 15, 50.

³⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 23.

³⁵ Augustine, *Expositions on psalm 120*, 8.

³⁶ Leo XIV, *Message to the participants in the ecumenical week in Stockholm on the centenary of the 1925 ecumenical meeting*, Stockholm, 18-24 August 2025

³⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 10:17; Romans 12:7; Augustine, *City of God*, X, 6.

is “love bearing all things readily for the sake of the object beloved.”³⁸ “Peace is not a spiritual utopia, said Pope Leo. “It is a humble path, made up of daily gestures that interweave patience and courage, listening and action, and which demands today, more than ever, our vigilant and generative presence.”³⁹

Let us listen to others, especially to the sufferings that have destroyed their peace; let us dialogue and offer our charity as a balm for their hearts. In our age, says Pope Leo, “marked by speed and immediacy, we need to recover the patience required for this process to occur. History and practical experience have taught us that authentic peace takes shape from the ground up, beginning with places, communities and local institutions, and by listening to what they have to tell us. In this way, we come to realize that peace is possible when disagreements and the conflicts they entail are not set aside, but acknowledged, understood and surmounted.”⁴⁰

The courage of peace is not dead silence but living witness: the courage to embrace and declare the fullness of life that Christ promises. “Christ’s peace is not the sepulchral silence that reigns after conflict; it is not the fruit of oppression, but rather a gift that is meant for all, a gift that brings new life”⁴¹ in which there is space for everyone, especially the poor, the excluded, the suffering, “standing alongside victims and seeing things from their point of view” since “this approach is essential for disarming hearts, approaches and mentalities”.⁴²

Christians have always been called, and always are called, to build what St. Paul VI called “a civilization of love,” and Pope Leo XIV calls “an unarmed and disarming peace,”⁴³ making it the theme of his Message for the 2026 World Day of Peace. Notwithstanding the tragic situations before our eyes, peace remains a difficult yet realistic good.⁴⁴ The world receives Christ's gift of salvation “by tirelessly striving to understand, forgive, liberate and welcome everyone, without calculation and without fear.”⁴⁵ The Church “challenges the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain to guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples.’ Only at this price is peace established between nations” (EA 70). Yet, the liberation and development we desire alongside peace are built only on the solidarity that flows from receiving the gift of God’s supernatural

³⁸ Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae et de Moribus Manichaeorum*, I, 15, 25.

³⁹ Leo XIV, *Address to the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 17 June 2025.

⁴⁰ Leo XIV, *Address to the movements and associations of the “Arena of Peace”*, Clementine Hall, 30 May 2025.

⁴¹ Leo XIV, *Address to participants in the jubilee of Oriental Churches*, Audience Hall, 14 May 2025.

⁴² Leo XIV, *Address to the movements and associations of the “Arena of Peace”*, Clementine Hall, 30 May 2025.

⁴³ Leo XIV, *First Blessing “Urbi et Orbi”*, Central Loggia of the Vatican Basilica, 8 May 2025.

⁴⁴ Leo XIV, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, Hall of Benediction, 9 January 2026.

⁴⁵ Leo XIV, *Homily*, 1 January 2026.

love in our ordinary lives. Let us be courageous in asking God for this gift and in letting this love guide and motivate the Church's entire mission in Africa.

Echoing *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Leo concludes: "The path to peace demands hearts and minds trained in concern for others and capable of perceiving the common good in today's world. For the road to peace involves everyone."⁴⁶ The road to peace needs the courage and the solidarity of everyone in Africa and throughout the world! Let us pray, in the concluding words of *Ecclesia in Africa*, that the Church may be "the seed and beginning on earth of the eternal Kingdom which will come to its perfection in the City that has God as its Builder: the City of justice, love and peace" (EA 144).

⁴⁶ Leo XIV, *Address to the movements and associations of the "Arena of Peace"*, Clementine Hall, 30 May 2025.