

PEACE AS A JOURNEY OF HOPE :
DIALOGUE, RECONCILIATION AND ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

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PRESENTATION OF

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I would like to propose a brief introduction to this Message of the Holy Father, underlining first the title of the text : Peace as a journey of Hope, Dialogue, Reconciliation and ecological Conversion.

This title puts in light we are called to consider peace as a way of social, political and spiritual dialogue : experience of hope and trust. But, at the same time, this message concerns a new way to consider Creation and future of life on our planet, our « common home ». That is the ecological conversion : to live consideration of Creation and respect of life and relationship with all kinds of life.

In this view, we need to be touched – and changed – by all people who suffer the physical and moral consequences of violence and war, in the past as well as today.

The reference, in the Message, to the recent Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father to Japan, at the end of November, appears as a key to get the interpretation of the reflection. Pope Francis developed, in Nagasaki, this « *perverse dichotomy, Pope says, that tries to defend and ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust, one that ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any form of dialogue* » (end of the quotation).

« *Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation.* » (Message of the Holy Father Francis for the celebration of the 53rd World Day of Peace, 1 January 2020).

This reflection, which links past and future, calls our common memory and opens our memory to trust the human capacities to pass from fear to cooperation... From producing and trading weapons to a way of human and integral development.

Peace appears, today more than never, as a great challenge, because the interests at stake, regarding relationships between peoples, communities and nations, are numerous and conflicting one another. We know that peace process begins with our look at the other/others. War begins with exclusion, marginalization, social inequality or manipulation. But peace processes require patience and enduring commitment, seeking truth and justice, never forgetting the memory of victims. Opening the way to respect of human rights, physical and moral integrity, and protecting the fundamental approach of life as a gift we received from God.

In our Christian experience, we remember Christ and His call to reconciliation which is, in His teaching, a step towards Kingdom of God. The vocation of the Church is to serve common good and, in this sense, to support all the initiatives of authentic peace, by transmitting Christian moral teaching and developing, as the first manifestation of peace, the « culture of encounter ».

To think peace as a journey means to break all intentions and behaviours which reduce the other (the others) in one attitude or in one word he (they) could have act in the past. « Choosing the path of respect, says the Message, we can break the spiral of vengeance and set out on the journey of hope. » We can remember here the conversation between Jesus and Peter (in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, 18) which put in light that it is not for one time but many times we are called to forgive : « As many as seven times ? » Peter says. Jesus answered : « Not seven times, but seventy times seven ».

To link reconciliation and ecological conversion emphasizes the conviction that the reconciliation we are called to promote, is a reconciliation with creation and our Creator, with the others and with ourselves. Conversion here means to stop reducing Creation as an instrument, only to produce immediate profits, and pulling limits in our economy and use of natural resources. It is the same respectful consideration of land, all living being and human community we are called to protect and to promote, as the reflection of the recent Synod on the Amazon underlined.

Finally we realize, receiving this Message, that the journey of reconciliation calls for patience and trust. We know that fear is frequently a source of conflict. The culture of « fraternal encounter » can shatter the « culture of violence ». For people who believe in Christ, this journey is sustained and always renewed by the sacrament of reconciliation. But, first of all, by the desire of peace. Reconciliation, as a sacrament, is the recognition of love received and of love to be offered.

The hope of reconciliation maintains the way opened to the future. As St. John of the Cross said : « *We obtain all we do hope for* ».