

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE IN JUSTICE AND PEACE

VATICAN CITY, 1 JAN 2012 (VIS) - In the Vatican Basilica this morning, Benedict XVI presided at a Eucharistic celebration for the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. The Mass was concelebrated by Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B.; Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; Archbishop Giovanni Angelo Becciu, substitute for General Affairs; Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States; Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and Bishop Mario Toso S.D.B., secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The ceremony also marked today's forty-fifth World Day of Peace, which has as its theme: "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace".

Extracts from Benedict XVI's homily are given below:

"On the first day of the year, the liturgy resounds in the Church throughout the world with the ancient priestly blessing that we heard during today's first reading: 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace'. ... In order to be blessed, we have to stand in God's presence, take His Name upon us and remain ... in a space lit up by His gaze, diffusing grace and peace".

"The shepherds of Bethlehem had ... the experience of standing in God's presence, they received His blessing ... in a stable, before a 'babe lying in a manger'. From this child, a new light issues forth, shining in the darkness of the night. ... Henceforth, it is from Him that blessing comes, from His name - Jesus, meaning 'God saves' - and from His human face, in which God, the almighty Lord of heaven and earth, chose to become incarnate, concealing His glory under the veil of our flesh, so as to reveal fully to us His goodness.

"The first to be swept up by this blessing was Mary the virgin. ... Her whole life was spent in the light of the Lord, within the radius of His name and of the face of God incarnate in Jesus, the 'blessed fruit of her womb'. ... The mystery of her divine motherhood that we celebrate today contains in superabundant measure the gift of grace that all human motherhood bears within it. ... The Mother of God is the first of the blessed, and it is she who bears the blessing; she is the woman who received Jesus into herself and brought Him forth for the whole human family".

"Mary is the mother and model of the Church. ... The Church also participates in the mystery of divine motherhood, through preaching, which sows the seed of the Gospel throughout the world, and through the Sacraments, which communicate grace and divine life to men. ... Like Mary, the Church is the mediator of God's blessing for the world: she receives it in receiving Jesus and she transmits it in bearing Jesus. He is the mercy and the peace that the world, of itself, cannot give, and which it needs always, at least as much as bread".

Jesus Christ, the path of peace

"The Church too, on the first day of the year, invokes this supreme good in a special way; she does so, like the Virgin Mary, by revealing Jesus to all, for as St.

Paul says, 'He is our peace', and at the same time the 'way' by which individuals and peoples can reach this goal to which we all aspire".

"Educating Young People in Justice and Peace' is a task for every generation, and thanks be to God, after the tragedies of the two great world wars, the human family has shown increasing awareness of it, as we can witness, on the one hand, from international statements and initiatives, and on the other, from the emergence among young people themselves, in recent decades, of many different forms of social commitment in this field. For the ecclesial community, educating men and women in peace is part of the mission received from Christ, it is an integral part of evangelisation, because the Gospel of Christ is also the Gospel of justice and peace".

"In the face of the shadows that obscure the horizon of today's world, to assume responsibility for educating young people in knowledge of the truth, in fundamental values and virtues, is to look to the future with hope. And in this commitment to a holistic education, formation in justice and peace has a place. Boys and girls today are growing up in a world that has, so to speak, become smaller, where contacts between different cultures and traditions, even if not always direct, are constant. For them, now more than ever, it is indispensable to learn the importance and the art of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, dialogue and understanding. Young people by their nature are open to these attitudes, but the social reality in which they grow up can lead them to think and act in the opposite way, even to be intolerant and violent. Only a solid education of their consciences can protect them from these risks and make them capable of carrying on the fight, depending always and solely on the power of truth and good. This education begins in the family and is developed at school and in other formative experiences. It is essentially about helping infants, children and adolescents to develop a personality that combines a profound sense of justice with respect for their neighbour, with a capacity to address conflicts without arrogance, with the inner strength to bear witness to good, even when it involves sacrifice, with forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus they will be able to become people of peace and builders of peace.

"In this task of educating young generations, a particular responsibility lies with religious communities. Every pathway of authentic religious formation guides the person, from the most tender age, to know God, to love Him and to do His will. God is love, He is just and peaceable, and anyone wishing to honour Him must first of all act like a child following his father's example. ... In God, justice and mercy come together perfectly, as Jesus showed us through the testimony of His life. ... Jesus is a way that can be travelled, open to everyone. He is the path of peace. Today the Virgin Mary points Him out to us, she shows us the Way: let us walk in it!".

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