

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE IN JUSTICE AND PEACE

Pope Benedict's 2012 World Day of Peace Message

In 1967, Pope Paul VI introduced the idea of having the whole world begin each year focused on peace. Every year since then, the Pope has issued a World Day of Peace message. Pope Benedict XVI's 2012 message recognizes the shadow of economic crises that face many nations, but brings a powerful and deeply affectionate message of hope centered on the intrinsic "enthusiasm and idealism" of the young. Find the entire document at

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace_en.html.

Here are some excerpts:

Attentiveness to young people and their concerns, the ability to listen to them and appreciate them, is not merely something expedient; it represents a primary duty for society as a whole, for the sake of building a future of justice and peace. (#1)

It is a matter of communicating to young people an appreciation for the positive value of life and of awakening in them a desire to spend their lives in the service of the Good. This is a task which engages each of us personally. (#1)

After calling on parents, educational institutions, political leaders and the media to help responsibly educate young people, Pope Benedict goes on:

Young people too need to have the courage to live by the same high standards that they set for others. Theirs is a great responsibility: may they find the strength to make good and wise use of their freedom. They too are responsible for their education, including their education in justice and peace! (#2)

The grateful recognition that life is an inestimable gift, then, leads to the discovery of one's own profound dignity and the inviolability of every single person. Hence the first step in education is learning to recognize the Creator's image in man, and consequently learning to have a profound respect for every human being and helping others to live a life consonant with this supreme dignity. (#3)

Only in relation to God does man come to understand also the meaning of human freedom. ...When man believes himself to be absolute, to depend on nothing and no one, to be able to do anything he wants, he ends up contradicting the truth of his own being and forfeiting his freedom. On the contrary, man is a relational being, who lives in relationship with others and especially with God. Authentic freedom can never be attained independently of God. (#3)

Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law that he did not lay upon himself, but which he must obey. Its voice calls him to love and to do what is good, to avoid evil and to take responsibility for the good he does and the evil he commits. (#3)

The right use of freedom, then, is central to the promotion of justice and peace, which require respect for oneself and others, including those whose way of being and living differs greatly from one's own. This attitude engenders the elements without which peace and justice remain merely words without content: mutual trust, the capacity to hold constructive dialogue, the possibility of forgiveness, which one constantly wishes to receive but finds hard to bestow, mutual charity, compassion towards the weakest, as well as readiness to make sacrifices. (#3)

"Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity."⁸ We Christians believe that Christ is our true peace: in him, by his Cross, God has reconciled the world to himself and has broken down the walls of division that separated us from one another (cf. *Eph* 2:14-18); in him, there is but one family, reconciled in love. (#5)

Peace, however, is not merely a gift to be received: it is also a task to be undertaken. In order to be true peacemakers, we must educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, working together, fraternity, in being active within the community and concerned to raise awareness about national and international issues and the importance of seeking adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth, the promotion of growth, cooperation for development and conflict resolution. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God", as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (*Mt* 5:9). (#5)

To the young, who have such a strong attachment to ideals, I extend a particular invitation to be patient and persevering in seeking justice and peace, in cultivating the taste for what is just and true, even when it involves sacrifice and swimming against the tide. (#6)

Dear young people, you are a precious gift for society. Do not yield to discouragement in the face of difficulties and do not abandon yourselves to false solutions which often seem the easiest way to overcome problems. Do not be afraid to make a commitment, to face hard work and sacrifice, to choose the paths that demand fidelity and constancy, humility and dedication. Be confident in your youth and its profound desires for happiness, truth, beauty and genuine love! Live fully this time in your life so rich and so full of enthusiasm. (#6)

Realize that you yourselves are an example and an inspiration to adults, even more so to the extent that you seek to overcome injustice and corruption and strive to build a better future. Be aware of your potential; never become self-centred but work for a brighter future for all. You are never alone. The Church has confidence in you, follows you, encourages you and wishes to offer you the most precious gift she has: the opportunity to raise your eyes to God, to encounter Jesus Christ, who is himself justice and peace. (#6)

All you men and women throughout the world, who take to heart the cause of peace: peace is not a blessing already attained, but rather a goal to which each and all of us must aspire. Let us look with greater hope to the future; let us encourage one another on our journey; let us work together to give our world a more humane and fraternal face; and let us feel a common responsibility towards present and future generations, especially in the task of training them to be people of peace and builders of peace. With these thoughts I offer my reflections and I appeal to everyone: let us pool our spiritual, moral and material resources for the great goal of “educating young people in justice and peace”. (#6)