**NON-VIOLENCE FOR PEACE**

*Excerpt from Pope Francis’ Message for the 50th World Day of Peace, which is celebrated on January 1st, on the theme: ‘Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace’.*

1. On this occasion, I would like to reflect on nonviolence as a style of politics for peace. I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promotors of nonviolent peacemaking. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships, and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms.

**A broken world**

2. While the last century knew the devastation of two deadly World Wars, the threat of nuclear war and a great number of other conflicts, today, sadly, we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal. It is not easy to know if our world is presently more or less violent than in the past, or to know whether modern means of communications and greater mobility have made us more aware of violence, or, on the other hand, increasingly inured to it.

In any case, we know that this “piecemeal” violence, of different kinds and levels, causes great suffering: wars in different countries and continents; terrorism, organized crime and unforeseen acts of violence; the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment. Where does this lead? Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value? Or does it merely lead to retaliation and a cycle of deadly conflicts that benefit only a few “warlords”?

Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all.

**The Good News**

3. Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for “it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (Mk 7:21). But Christ’s message in this regard offers a radically positive approach. He unfailingly preached God’s unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives. He taught his disciples to love their enemies (cf. Mt 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (cf. Mt 5:39). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (cf. Jn 8:1-11), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (cf. Mt 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. Eph 2:14-16). Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God’s mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: “As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts”.3

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence. As my predecessor Benedict XVI observed, that teaching “is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with more love, with more goodness. This ‘more’ comes from God”.4 He went on to stress that: “For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God’s love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution’”.5 The Gospel command to love your enemies (cf. Lk 6:27) “is rightly considered the magna carta of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil…, but in responding to evil with good (cf. Romans 12:17-21), and thereby breaking the chain of injustice”.6

3 “The Legend of the Three Companions”, *Fonti Francescane*, No. 1469.
4 BENEDICT XVI, Angelus, 18 February 2007.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.