

INTRODUCTION



“Remember well: Peace is possible.”

Pope Francis has spoken often and passionately about both the need for peace in the world and our call to be peacemakers. For him, the act of becoming a peacemaker is an inside job—we start by making peace within ourselves, then with those closest to us, then with the wider community, and, finally, with the world.

As always, he lists prayer as the absolute foundation of all our efforts—prayer where we don’t just talk to God, but listen to where and how God is guiding us.

Here are thirty days of reflections on Pope Francis’ words about peace. “The root of peace lies in the capacity to listen,” he said in his New Year’s Day address in 2017. May listening to him help us open our ears, eyes, and hearts to all the ways we can become agents of peace in our world.

The quotes from Pope Francis were chosen by Deborah McCann, who also wrote the reflections and the “Ponder” and “Pray” pieces.

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1 | A THREAD OF HOPE

Peace is the thread that unites earth to heaven. It is a word both simple and difficult—simultaneously.

Pope Francis provides a multifaceted definition of peace. Peace, he says, is *forgiveness*, which comes from prayer and the willingness to heal old hurts. Peace is also *welcome*, when we become ready to engage in dialogue with those whose viewpoints differ from our own. Peace is *cooperation*, where we actively engage with our brothers and sisters to bring about change. Finally, peace is *education*, the never-ending challenge of growing and learning, of being willing to engage in a culture of encounter. To be a peacemaker is to accept the vocation to see with the eyes of Christ at all times. Simple *and* difficult, yes!

PONDER

Which aspect of being a peacemaker do I need most?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, help me to grow beyond myself into a real peacemaker.

2 | BRIDGES AND WALLS

There are times you may offer your hand and find it rejected; this is something we must suffer on the path to doing good. But always try to build a bridge.

Walls foster hatred, but bridges lead to peace. Peacemakers always seek to build bridges. Pope Francis brings this image home very neatly when he says that just extending your hand to shake another's hand is building a bridge. It is such a simple yet powerful gesture! Even if our offer of peace is rejected, says Pope Francis, don't retaliate, and don't stop reaching out. Every time we reach out, we invite dialogue, and dialogue is the beginning of understanding.

PONDER

To whom can I reach out today in the name of peace?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, help me curb any impulse to strike out when hurt, and help me be filled with peace.

3 | IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

May the image and likeness of God in each person enable us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts.

In his New Year's address for 2017, as he prayed for peace for the entire world and for every man, woman, and child, Pope Francis reminded us all of our inherent dignity as the image and likeness of God. He suggested that this very dignity should make us eager to approach one another from a perspective of respect. His conviction that every person is a reflection of God's face gives great power to his call for peace. If we all truly believe that every encounter we have with another person is an encounter with God, how can we fail to be respectful, open-minded, and unafraid?

PONDER

Do I see God reflected in the faces of others?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, help me to remember that I am yours, and so is everyone else!

4 | PEACE IN OUR HEARTS

*The human heart is the true battlefield
where violence and peace meet.*

When we're tempted to think that the world is far more complicated now than it was in Jesus' time, and that therefore any action we take is futile, Pope Francis reminds us that things really haven't changed. Like the people in Jesus' day, we can't escape the truth that the best and worst sides of our human nature are in constant conflict. Violence and peace are always vying for prominence. If we are open to the call to be peacemakers, then we must recognize this truth about our humanity and work on asking for God's mercy on our weakness. Then we can more easily accept the weakness in another.

PONDER

How often does my peaceful side prevail?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, help me to call on you in my weakness, and open my eyes to accept the same frailty in others.

5 | THE REAL FACE OF GOD

For God, power does not mean force or destruction but love; and justice is not vengeance but mercy.

It helps sometimes, Pope Francis says, to step back and consider the mystery of the Incarnation, that great event of God coming to us as one of us, just like us in every way but sin. Imagine a person with only our good side to offer—how different would life be if we all could act simply out of grace and mercy and love? That's what Pope Francis is asking us to imagine. In God's eyes, power has nothing to do with dominance but *everything* to do with love. And justice is not about seeking payback but about offering mercy and understanding. Seeing through God's eyes and living a life of compassion and empathy begins in prayer and by listening to others.

PONDER

How good is my "best" side?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, help me on my bad days to remember that love is the only answer!

6 | ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

Let us dedicate ourselves to becoming nonviolent people and building nonviolent communities.

“Everyone can be an artisan of peace,” Pope Francis declared in his New Year’s Day message for 2017. He understands at the same time that people all over the planet who work for peace and justice, even in the smallest ways, may be saddened and hurt by the rejection and disdain of others. Nonetheless, he maintains that everything is possible with God. Jesus’ cross is a symbol of failure in the eyes of the world; but for those of us who believe, it is a great symbol of the triumph of good over evil. If we believe in nonviolence as a path to peace, and we work for nonviolence, our efforts will not be in vain, because they follow the way of Christ.

PONDER

Do I truly live a nonviolent life?

PRAY

God of peace and mercy, fill me with your spirit of peace so I may share it everywhere!