

Mass for Peace in Syria

I. Introduction

I welcome all of you here to the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. As you know, this Mass was originally scheduled especially for our homeschooling families, but last Sunday, at his noon-day Angelus, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, appealed to the Church and to the world that today be designated a Day of Fasting and Prayer for Peace in Syria, the Middle East, and throughout the world.

So this morning all of us are gathered in this great Cathedral for a special Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, as together we pray for peace, welcoming at the same time those families among us who are committed to the education of their children at home.

II. When There Is Peace in the Home As we pray for the gift of peace, especially in the most troubled areas of our world, let us consider, for a moment, how this relates to our families, to our formation in knowledge and virtue, to our homes, and ourselves.

Saint Augustine famously defined peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*, that is to say, the tranquility of order. When there is order, there will be peace; when there is chaos, there will be discord. This is true not only for societies and nations, but first of all, for ourselves.

Indeed, a Chinese philosopher, writing six centuries before the birth of Christ, formulated this reality in these words: If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace between nations. If there is to be peace between the nations, there must be peace between cities. If there is to be peace between cities, there must be peace between neighbors. If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in the home. If there is to be peace in the home, there must be peace in the heart.

III. Not Just the Absence of War

And peace, my friends, is not just the absence of war. What is it then? And where does peace in the heart begin? Let's start here: Our Lord himself said, "Seek first

the Kingdom of God...and all these things will be given you besides.” In other words, when *first things* are first in our minds and hearts, when *our priorities are rightly ordered*, then everything else tends naturally to fall into its proper place. “Seek first the Kingdom of God...and all these things will be given you besides.”

But when we allow fourth or fifth things to become first, and our priorities- our loves, our attentions, our energies — are *wrongly ordered*, then there is chaos within us, since we as human persons are ‘hard-wired’ to know and love the living God. When that priority is inverted, then, chaos within us manifests itself in discord, discord which ripples out from our hearts, and into our homes, and out into the world.

Peace is not just the *absence* of war; it is the *presence* of the Prince of Peace. And this is true of everyone, whether they realize it or not, for we are all children of the same Father. So to pray for peace in the world is to pray first of all for the conversion of hearts and minds, beginning with our own: a conversion that allows us to recognize the presence of the Kingdom of God, and to allow that King to reign, first of all, within ourselves. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done” – in me.

IV. The Domestic Church When a baby is baptized, the Ritual of Baptism beautifully says

that Christian parents “will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith,” and prays that they may be “the best of teachers, bearing witness to the Faith by what they say and do, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The call of Christian parents, then, is a call to join with God Himself

in the supremely important work of populating Heaven. This they do not only by cooperating with the Creator in allowing new life to come into the world, but also by teaching and forming those new young lives in faith and virtue.

One of the primary ways they do this is by providing homes where there is peace and order, thereby providing an environment in which faith and virtue can grow and flourish. In so doing, they create a *domestic church* in which children can learn to “Seek first the Kingdom of God... [so that] all these things [can] be given [them]

besides.”

It is the mission of Catholic education to foster these truths in the minds and hearts of our young people. And today, to those parents among us who do that even by providing curricular instruction to their children in their homes, I salute you, I support you, and I pray that your work and your sacrifice will bear abundant fruit in your families and in the Church.

V. Conclusion: Praying with the Holy Father for Peace

With all this in mind, let us turn to the Prince of Peace to pray for a just and lasting peace in our world, especially in those parts of it where peace is most in danger. So in union with our Holy Father, Pope Francis, we pray:

Almighty eternal God, source of all compassion, the promise of your mercy and saving help fills our hearts with hope. Hear the cries of the people of Syria; bring healing to those suffering from the violence, and comfort to those mourning the dead. Empower and encourage Syria’s neighbors in their care and welcome for refugees. Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms, and strengthen the resolve of those committed to peace.

O God of hope and Father of mercy, your Holy Spirit inspires us to look beyond ourselves and our own needs. Inspire leaders to choose peace over violence and to seek reconciliation with enemies. Inspire the Church around the world with compassion for the people of Syria, and fill us with hope for a future of peace built on justice for all.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Light of the World, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.