



A Letter from His Excellency
Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde

On the Occasion of the
World Day of Peace

January 1, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

The start of a new year provides us with an opportunity to reflect upon the events of the past and to look forward in hope. In such a troubled time as ours, one in which so many innocent lives are claimed through violence at home and abroad, it would be understandable for us ask, “Lord, how do I maintain peace and cultivate hope in the midst of such uncertainty? In a world of distrust, animosity, and terror, who is my neighbor?”

These questions are borne from a disturbing surge of violence carried out in some of our most familiar places: places of worship, schools, workplaces, and recreational spaces. Some acts of violence are carried out by men and women who suffer from psychological illnesses or who act from a state of isolation and despair. Still others are religiously motivated, to which our Holy Father has responded: “In the face of such acts, one cannot but condemn this unspeakable attack on the dignity of the human person. I want to vigorously reaffirm that the path of violence and hate does not resolve the problems of humanity, and using the name of God to justify this path is blasphemy!” (Pope Francis, Angelus, November 15, 2015)

It is helpful to remember that Our Lord came as the Prince of Peace and joined Himself to our humanity, to a world that is broken and at war with itself. During Advent we read, “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert” (cf. Lk 3:1-2).

These were not leaders known for just and merciful actions: historians have described Tiberius, the second Roman Emperor, as a bloody tyrant; Herod the Great was known for a cruel and violent reign; Annas and Caiaphas exercised rigid control over the Jewish people; and Pontius Pilate would later consent to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord understands anxiety and fear; He Himself experienced it in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion (cf. Lk 22:42). However, he fervently instructs us, His disciples, to maintain peace in the midst of tribulation (cf. Jn 16:33). This might seem impossible in the face of terror, but we know that all things are possible for God (cf. Mt 19:26). Our Lord assures us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (cf. Jn 14:27).

How do we avail ourselves of the Lord’s peace? We receive it firstly through prayer, the reception of the Sacraments, and spiritual counsel. We also find it by committing ourselves to respecting the dignity of all human life, beginning in our homes and neighborhoods. As Christians, we must strengthen our marriages, cultivate a rich family life, and persevere in our vocations. We will build up peace in our communities through charitable outreach to our brothers and sisters, especially to those persons who are most vulnerable.

What disturbs peace? Prejudice, hatred, and unjust suspicion towards others all threaten peace - in our own hearts and between neighbors. To be sure, anger is an appropriate response to injustice, but as I have written, “Revenge and resentment are deeply entrenched human emotions which we have all experienced. Yet as Catholics, we know a higher road. We are called to respond to terrorism by imitating Our Lord, the loving author of peace and justice. For Jesus said, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’” (cf. To Remember Well: A Pastoral Letter on the Fifth Anniversary of September 11, 2001).

Yes, like many in the Gospels, we might respond, “This saying is hard. Who can accept it?” (cf. Jn 6:60) In these moments, we turn to the example of Our Lord who forgave those -- forgave us -- who nailed Him to the Cross. We move forward in this Jubilee of Mercy, praying and working for peace, taking comfort in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ: “I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (cf. Jn 16:33).

With Prayers for Your Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Loverde". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington