



OPTATISSIMA PAX

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII ON PRESCRIBING PUBLIC PRAYERS FOR SOCIAL AND WORLD PEACE DECEMBER 18, 1947

To the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Greeting and Apostolic Blessing.

Peace, longed for so hopefully, which should signify the tranquillity of order^[1] and serene liberty,^[2] even after the cruel experience of a long war, still hangs in uncertain balance, as everyone must note with sadness and alarm. Moreover, people's hearts and minds are kept in a state of anxious suspense, while in not a few nations -- already laid waste by the world-conflict and its sorry aftermath of ruin and distress -- the social classes are being incited to mutual hatred as their continuous rioting and agitation plainly threaten to subvert the very foundations of civil society.

2. With this scene of disaster and misery before Us, Our heart is heavy with the weight of bitter sorrow and We cannot but feel compelled, by reason of the charge of universal fatherhood which God has laid upon Us, not only to entreat the nations one and all to have done with rancor and make peace once more as friends, but also to urge all Our children in Christ to storm heaven with more fervent prayers, never forgetting that all efforts are inadequate and unavailing if God's good pleasure is not first obtained, according to the inspired words of the Psalmist: "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."^[3]

3. The crisis is most serious indeed. Remedies must be found, and found without further delay. On the one hand the economic system of many nations, as a result of fabulous military expenditures and enormous destruction wrought by the war, has been dislocated and weakened to such an extent as to be powerless to meet the problems with which it is faced, and to provide the materials for appropriate

constructive enterprise, where work might be available for the unemployed who now must live their lives in forced and fruitless idleness. On the other hand there is no lack of those who, sad to say, embitter and exploit the working man in his distress, following a secret and astute plan, and thus abstract the heroic efforts which the forces of justice and order are making to rebuild scattered fortunes.

4. But everyone must come to realize that lost wealth will not be recovered, or present

wealth secured, by discord, public tumult, fratricide. This result can be achieved only by working together in harmony, by cooperation, by peaceful labor.

5. Those who deliberately and rashly plan to incite the masses to tumult, sedition, or infringement of the liberty of others are certainly not helping to relieve the poverty of the people but are rather increasing it by fomenting mutual hatred and disturbing the established order; this can even lead to complete chaos. Factional strife "has been and will be to many nations a greater calamity than war itself, than famine or disease." [4]

6. At the same time it is the duty of all to realize that the world crisis is so serious today and so menacing for the future that it is imperative for all, especially the rich, to place the common welfare above their private advantage and profits.

7. But it must be clearly and constantly borne in mind that the first and most urgent need is to reconcile the hearts of men, to bring them to fraternal agreement and cooperation, so that they may set to work upon plans and projects in keeping with the demands of Christian teaching and needs of the present situation.

8. Let all remember that the flood of evil and disaster that has over-taken the world in past years was due chiefly to the fact that the divine religion of Jesus Christ, that provider of mutual charity among citizens, peoples and nations, did not govern, as it should, private, domestic and public life. If things have gone wrong on account of the desertion from Christ, public and private life must return to Him as soon as possible: if error has clouded the minds of men, they must return to that truth which, revealed from on high, indicates the right way to heaven: if hatred has brought them fatal results, they must return to Christian love which alone can heal their many wounds, and carry them over the crisis so filled with danger.

9. At the approach of the consoling feast of Christmas, which recalls the Child Jesus in the cradle and the choir of Angels singing peace to men, We think it opportune to exhort all Christians, especially those in the flower of youth, to crowd around the holy crib and there to pray the Divine Infant to be pleased to ward off the threats of impending struggles and to quench the torches of revolt. May He illumine with light from above minds which are less often moved by stubborn malice than deceived by errors under the semblance of truth; may He repress and soothe rancor in men's minds, compose discords and give new life and vigor to Christian

charity. May He teach those who are wealthy, generosity to the poor, and may He console by His example and aid from on high those who are in need and distress and lead them to desire above all those heavenly gifts which are more precious and lasting .

10. During the present difficulties, We place much trust in the prayers of innocent children for whom the Divine Redeemer cherishes a special love. Particularly during Christmas time, let them raise to Him their limpid voices and tiny hands, tokens of interior innocence, in united prayer, imploring peace, harmony and mutual charity. To their fervent prayers, We desire them to add the works of Christian piety and those gifts of Christian generosity which may placate the Divine Justice offended by so many crimes, and, as their means allow, bring relief to the needy.

11. We are confident, Venerable Brethren, that your prompt and zealous action will insure a hearty response to Our paternal exhortation, and that all, especially the young, will answer with enthusiasm this appeal which you will make your own.

12. Relying on this hope, to each and all of you, Venerable Brethren, as well as the flocks confided to your care, We impart with overflowing heart the Apostolic Benediction, a testimony of Our fatherly affection and a pledge of heavenly graces.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the 18th day of December in the year 1947 and the ninth of Our Pontificate.

REFERENCES:

- 1. St. Aug., De Civ. Dei, 1, 19, c, 13; St. Thos., II-II, 29, 1 ad 1m.
- 2. Cic., 2, a Philippica, c. 44.
- 3. Ps.126,1.
- 4. Liv. Hist. 1, Iv. c. 9.