

World Day of Peace Mass
Homily
January 1, 2016
Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr

“God is not indifferent! God cares about mankind! God does not abandon us!” (no. 1) With this conviction, Pope Francis opens his World Day of Peace Message this year, titled “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace.”

If there is one thing that we should take away from our readings for this Solemnity of Mary celebration, it’s this. God is not indifferent to us. In our First Reading, God tells Moses to let the Israelites know, after they had escaped from slavery in Egypt and encamped in the Sinai desert, that he continues to be with them in their suffering and struggles. His face shines upon them, because God deeply cares about what happens to them. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, exclaims that God’s affection for us is so strong that He sees us as His own sons and daughters. St. Paul shares this analogy because few bonds in the human experience are as intense, instinctual and meaningful as those between a parent and a child. God really does care about us that much!

And if that wasn’t enough, the Christmas narrative, continued in our Gospel today, is a reminder that our omnipotent Creator chose to subject Himself to the fragility of human life. He tells us every time we remember the Christmas story, “I know what you’re going through. I am with you.” Then, having opened our hearts, He shares the Good News that so much more awaits us. Because Mary and Joseph had no place but a stable to bring Christ into the world, the homeless, recognizing their plight in Him, may feel a unique affinity to this message. Migrants may readily feel the presence of Jesus journeying closely beside them, for the Christ-child was clutched tightly by his parents soon after His birth as they fled as refugees into Egypt. And, ultimately, all of us who struggle in any way can turn to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and know that he is with us. He willingly suffered to ease our sufferings and to redeem them, so that we might inherit eternal life. God really does care about us that much.

Given this incredible fondness that God has for us, we must ask ourselves... Do we care that God cares? Do we see His work in our lives as worth celebrating each and every day? Do we regularly come to Mass, full of gratitude and eager to receive His body and blood again? Do we turn to the people of the world around us and lovingly embrace them, because that’s what God is doing with us and it’s what He commanded us to do in return?

It’s noteworthy that the Holy Father has chosen to talk about “indifference” as a major threat to world peace, rather than, say, hate. He keenly recognizes that indifference is a threat, not because of its active resistance to peace, but because it’s not active towards anything at all. “Indifference” means not concerned one way or another, not interested, not caring. While some people may heinously throw stones at others, for instance, indifferent people simply don’t care what’s happening. Their hearts are as hard, as inanimate, as unfeeling as the very stones being hurled at the victims. Rather than intervene or question what’s happening, the indifferent person instead just looks on or walks away, too eager to avoid trouble and to return to his or her uninterrupted life.

Pope Francis explains:

[Indifference] shows itself in lack of concern for what is happening around us, especially if it does not touch us directly. Some people prefer not to ask questions or seek answers; they lead lives of comfort, deaf to the cry of those who suffer. Almost imperceptibly, we grow incapable of feeling compassion for others and for their problems; we have no interest in caring for them, as if their troubles were their own responsibility, and none of our business. (no. 3)

Just around us in our Archdiocese, there are many voices imploring that we not be indifferent to their pleas. We hear it, for example,...

- From newly arrived immigrant families and refugees fleeing poverty and unspeakable violence in their homelands;
- From the unborn;
- From women in crisis pregnancies;
- From those of religious conviction, whether they be Catholics forced to do things against their conscience or the great majority of our Muslim brothers and sisters who are increasingly the subject of undue suspicion;
- From victims of crime;
- From those re-entering society from prison, who are looking for a second chance;
- From those in troubled marriages;
- From anyone who has not felt welcomed or respected by any minister of the Church; and
- From the Earth, our common home.

In any of these cases, and so many others, perhaps one of the most pressing anxieties anyone can face is a sense that no one really cares.

Everyplace and everywhere, in a follower of Jesus, someone should find the answer, “Yes, I do care.” The Holy Father spells it out: “In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, no.12). Mercy is the force that overcomes indifference. “Mercy is the heart of God,” Pope Francis exclaims (no. 5).

Undoubtedly, the countless cries for mercy in this world can be overwhelming. We may even be indifferent to some things, because, while we may very well be caring people, we simply cannot take on everyone’s burdens. Only Jesus Christ himself can carry the weight of the world. And, praise God, that Our Savior can do just that!

Yet we should also take great joy in the fact that, as a universal Church, we are organized to be the Body of Christ to distribute God’s mercy to the ends of the Earth. You, I, and all other Catholics, along with our ecumenical and interfaith friends and all people of good will, can work together to deliver the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy through charity and justice until God brings all things into fulfillment. “Our eternal destiny depends on this,” Pope Francis alerts us (no.5). Through your work in the wonderful ministries represented here today, and many others like them, we overcome indifference. We know and show mercy, and we make way for a future of peace.

We do all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Because by showing how much we care about all who cry for mercy, we help them understand too that God really does care about them – about all of us – that much.

May God bless you and your families today and throughout this New Year.