

## THE WORLD IN THE SUMMER OF 2022

The international situation at this time is perilous. The senseless and brutal war continues in Ukraine where Russia seems set on destroying this independent state. The reaction of the rest of the world has been one of paralyzed shock. There have been loud protests and condemnations, as well as military and other help to Ukraine. However, without the firm resolve of the international community to end the invasion and halt Russia's assault there is no way to prevent the war from achieving its goal. This in turn will establish a new precedent for the foreseeable future that illegal aggressive military action by powerful nations will not be stopped. It opens the way to further military escapades by Russia and maybe China and others.

The countries of Eastern Europe are gripped by fear at the prospect of an increasingly militant and aggressive Russia breathing down their necks. Their only hope is that membership of NATO will insure a more robust response from their NATO allies.

Russia can act with impunity because the US and Europe are afraid of a nuclear strike by Russia. This gives Russia the upper hand and makes the western response look weak and indecisive. Of course, nobody wants to provoke a nuclear war that would be devastating for the entire world. However, Russia has been able to capitalize on that fear and to proceed with its deadly military campaign.

The dependence of some European countries on Russian gas is also contributing to the sense of a faltering response and indecision on the part of Europe. Germany and Italy in particular but other countries as well are dependent on Russian fuel and are delivering large sums of money every month to Russia that is fuelling the war. On the one hand, Europe is imposing economic sanctions and on the other it is paying Russia huge sums for gas. It is a symbol of the confusion and paralysis of international politics right now.



The war in Ukraine comes at a time when international institutions like the United Nations and the European Union are at their weakest. The controlling power of the veto in the UN has made it almost impossible for that organization to pursue its role as good impartial mediator and peacemaker in the world. Narrow national interests are crippling the EU and preventing it from being a champion and example of peaceful, collaborative, democratic action for the good of the world. The United States is embroiled in an internal war about its democratic values and is lurching towards a narrow and bitter form of conservative monopoly. This is made evident by the recent series of conservative judgments passed down by the Supreme Court that appear to support the political agenda of one party.

It is hard to see any possible political initiative that will rescue the world from immanent chaos. At the same time, the world is not without hope. For my part, I see that hope coming from the Christian community awakened to its mission to be the sign and instrument of unity and peace in the world. This was the inspired vision of Pope John XIII when he convoked the Second Vatican Council at the height of the Cold War and the immanent threat of nuclear devastation. During the Council, the Catholic Church struggled to free itself from an inward looking preoccupation with its internal life, and the historical conflicts with other Christians and the modern world. It retrieved an awareness of its mission to announce Good News to the whole world and to transform the world into the Kingdom of God, “a kingdom of truth and justice, of peace and love.” The Catholic Church is still struggling to appropriate this new vision but today’s crisis is making it more relevant than ever.

Today it is the mission of the Church and of every disciple of Jesus to respond to the crisis of war, division, fear and suspicion with the Good News of God’s alternative for the world. Christians are called to be missionaries of mercy and compassion, of peace and reconciliation and of hope for a better future. Under the guidance of Pope Francis, Catholics are urged to counter the culture of suspicion with the Christian culture of encounter, to counter the mood of anxiety and despair with the joy of the Gospel and the assurance of God’s presence in the world.

Christians have to take their distance from the popular political movements that are fomenting fear and despair, and that sow the seeds of hostility and violence towards strangers and those who are different. We do this in full recognition of the natural attachment to one's place and tribe. It is important to appreciate one's family ties as well as the historical, cultural and religious bonds that hold people together. However, the Gospel of Jesus is an invitation to open our hearts and minds to see all people as our brothers and sisters, all equally loved by God and members of God's one human family. This is the new vision of faith and the beginning of the new creation promised by Jesus. Christians are the artisans of the new creation and of the new humanity that ushers in the Kingdom of God and the end of all division, suspicion, and violence, and instead creates a new civilization of truth and justice, of love and peace.

The daily commitment of Christians as peace makers and messengers of God's compassion and mercy is the sign of hope that will lift the hearts of people and sow the seeds of a better future for all. As disciples of Jesus, we do not have a political agenda and do not aspire to political power. We have a message, the Good News of the Kingdom, and above all we are filled with the power of God's Spirit to bring God's transforming love into a broken world. We do not claim to have all the answers or solutions but we can contribute to a new atmosphere of hope by resisting the forces of despair, fear and anger that draw people into conflict and violence. We can encourage our relatives, friends and neighbors to join us in a movement of hope and new life based on the Gospel of Jesus and inspired by his Holy Spirit.

The world is in a perilous state and the risk of even greater conflict and violence increases with every passing day. But we do not lose hope because "the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5, 5). Filled by the Spirit, the disciples of Jesus live in the world alongside their brothers and sisters and speak words of peace, work to overcome misunderstandings, and sow the seeds of unity. It is in the many small gestures of Christian goodness that the walls of separation can come down and the fog of fear can be cleared. This is the gift of the Church to the world today. It is also our calling and our dignity as disciples of Jesus to be his instruments in bringing closer the kingdom of God for the good of humanity and the whole world.