

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S ADVENT-CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2023



My dear Brothers, Sisters, and Friends in the Passionist family,

As we begin this Advent season which gives us the opportunity to focus on our preparation for the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation, *i.e.* *God becoming human, being born into our world and history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth*, we cannot help but bring our minds to the very land and people in which Jesus was born and lived, which in this very moment of history is experiencing and undergoing intolerable suffering and destruction by war. Yet, this is the land and people among whom God chose for Jesus to be born in and live his human life as the “Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6).

Of course, while the “war on Gaza” commands headline news at this time, we must not forget the ongoing wars and other violent conflicts causing untold suffering and destruction to people, property and nature in other parts of our world, such as in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Haiti, but to name a few. According to the United Nations (UN), conflict and violence are on the rise, warning that peace is



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more under threat around the world now than it has been since World War II. The impact of these conflicts is severe. Millions die; citizens become refugees, food and water become scarce; economies collapse; infrastructure (homes, schools, places of worship and work) are destroyed. And, as the poet Robert Burns said: "*Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn!*" We can and we do feel helpless and hopeless. We want to hope for



peace, but we often despair. It all seems so senseless and impossible. For many the hope for peace is just a pipedream! The seeds of violence are innate within the human person and conflict has a long history. It reaches back to the story of the first two brothers: Cain and

Abel who chose to respond in a manner contrary to God's design and God's dream for justice, love and peace – *the kingdom of God*.

In a beautiful cordial meeting of the Union of Superiors General (men and women) with Pope Francis last month, a question was asked of the Holy Father: "*What is your dream for a synodal church?*" Pope Francis began by responding: "*Sometimes the dream is a nightmare!*" Similarly, in the dream for peace, the prophet Jeremiah expresses the pain in God's heart:

They have healed the wounds of my people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace...we look for peace, but no good came, for a time of healing, but behold, terror...My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me...For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded, I mourn, and my dismay has taken hold on me. – Jer. 8:11,15,18

We hear the cries from war victims and other conflict-ridden groups to just be allowed to live in peace. We see thousands of people all over the world gather to protest (sometimes violently) and call on world leaders to advocate for peace in conflict zones and invest in humanitarian efforts. However, this often ends up only in achieving a temporary ceasefire and lull in



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violence, and not a solution in bringing about lasting peace, because the root of the problem lies deep in every human heart which needs to be genuinely examined. From a Christian perspective, an **ongoing conversion** motivated by, and in response to God's grace is necessary. **Faith** is of the essence as we receive the gift of peace offered us by the Risen Christ and pray: *"...look not on our sins, Lord, but on our faith...and graciously grant us peace and unity in accordance with your will."*

While we may struggle and feel helpless in stopping wars and fighting on a global scale, each of us can open to examine our personal lives before God and choose to adopt a peaceful lifestyle in our relationships with God, others, nature, and self. As are the words of the song: *"Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with ME..."* Peace is not just the absence of war and violence, but it is a way of being, a lifestyle which reflects justice, forgiveness, understanding, empathy, compassion, and reconciliation. This is what we see reflected in the life of Jesus and in his passion: *"Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do"* (Lk. 23:34). In standing at the foot of the Cross with Mary and contemplating the crucified Jesus, we, too, can have our hearts formed to reflect peace, and fight against any feelings which tempt us to act with revenge, violence and hate.

The Advent mantra: **MARANATHA = Come, Lord Jesus!** can be our simple prayer in faith during this holy and joyful season when we prepare our lives and hearts to receive our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. **Prayer** is essential and it is a positive and powerful action that we can en-



gage in to support and stand in solidarity with all those who are suffering in whatever way at this time. As Pope Francis said in his Angelus message on the feast of Christ the Universal King (26 November 2023): *"...prayer*

is the force for peace that shatters the spiral of hatred, breaks the cycle of vengeance, and offers unexpected paths of reconciliation."



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*Maranatha!
Come, Lord Jesus,
into the lives of all those
who are suffering.
Heal them
with the balm
of your peace.*

*Come, Lord Jesus,
form my heart
to be a sign
and instrument
of your peace.*

**A CALL TO PRAYER
FOR THE PASSIONIST FAMILY**

*I invite all members
of the Passionist Family
– consecrated religious and laity –
to gather in the communities, groups,
families, parishes, retreat & spiritual centres
for one hour of
**ADVENT PRAYER for PEACE
and CONVERSION**
before the images of the
Blessed Sacrament (where possible)
and the Crucifix,
on **Thursday, 14 December 2023.***

Waiting in joyful hope for the coming of the Prince of Peace, we pray: **“Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus into the lives of all those who are suffering. Heal them with the balm of your peace.”** Let each one of us also examine our hearts before the Crucified in his passion, and pray: **“Come, Lord Jesus, form my heart to be a sign and instrument of your peace.”**

***I wish you a blessed Advent season
and a joyful Christmas and New Year
filled with God's peace.***

~ Fr. Joachim Rego, C.P.
Superior General