

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS



PASTORAL LETTER 2017

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INTRODUCTION

GRATITUDE:

1. Last year 2016 on the directive of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, we celebrated the Mercy of God with the Universal Church. (Dec. 8, 2015 Nov. 20, 2016). It was a great opportunity and privilege for us in Onitsha Archdiocese, to reflect on the mercy of God, the meaning of mercy as a virtue and the implications of the call to be merciful which is one of the beatitudes. Given the enthusiastic and warm reception of our pastoral message on mercy and inspired by reading the signs of the times, I invite you my beloved people of God to reflect with me on yet another beatitude, “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

In the words of the great Preacher and Teacher, RANIERO CANTALAMESSA, “this beatitude, like the beatitude about the merciful, speaks about our need to do something” not only speaking about our need to be something (poor, mournful, meek, pure of heart). (cf. R. Cantalamessa, Beautitudes: Eight steps to happiness, Franciscan media, Ohio pg. 97).

In addition, this beatitude in a way touches the rest of the beatitudes. I am convinced, that the integration of the beatitude of mercy and peace and indeed the whole of them will help us in our appreciation of our Christian commitment to God and to our neighbours.

2. My revered brother in the Episcopate, beloved priests, consecrated men and women and my dear people of God, it is once more my special privilege to be able to reflect with you this year on the incalculable gift of being Christians in Nigeria and specifically within the Catholic Archdiocese and Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha. It is our utmost duty never to slack in thanking God since doing so enables us to realize and appreciate the profundity of His endowment and the obligation to respond to it in most appropriate and fitting manner. To God our most loving, provident Father be all glory, honor, praise and thanksgiving now and forever.

We continue on the same note of gratitude by thanking all who have been instruments in the powerful hands of God, tilling in the various areas of the pastoral ministry and thus helping to fulfill the mandate to bring His Kingdom to the ends of the earth (Acts, 1:8). We thank our Auxiliary Bishop, our priests, the religious, the lay faithful for the continuous and sincere engagement in seeking the Lord and making Him know to their brothers and sisters.

3. We are in a special way grateful to all who helped to make a success of the year of mercy which ended in November 2016. The Year of Mercy was an opportunity to pay special attention to an aspect of our faith and life which is so fundamental that Pope Francis was pleased to describe God as mercy. It is very encouraging that so many Catholics among us took up the call to understand and live out the mercy of God, undertaking various enriching religious observances, making pilgrimages, and receiving plenary indulgence in the process; It is our prayer that the gains of the

Year of Mercy would continue to be manifest in our lives even after the closure of the official celebration. May we now become doors of mercy and agents of divine mercy to our brothers and sisters. I am also personally grateful for the reception of my reflections on mercy, Blessed are the Merciful. The aim of the pastoral letter is to help in instilling the virtue of mercy in our Christians, and thus we pray that God will strengthen our collective resolve toward this and supply for our deficiencies, since without Him we can do nothing (John 15:15).

Still on a note of gratitude, we recall that last year 2016, (May 22nd - 28th), the entire Archdiocese of Onitsha celebrated our second diocesan synod. The Synod is an opportunity to reflect on our Christian life and its obligations and to consider how best to fulfill the mandate of living the Good news and spreading it to the farthest ends of the earth. We are grateful for the inspired participation of priests and laity in the synod. It was very encouraging to witness the eagerness of the faithful in discussing and suggesting possible avenues to advance the course of evangelization. It was a gathering in which each and every participant had the same goal of positive response to the call of God with numerous views and suggestions of how to realize the implications of that call. The Synod has no doubt fertilized the grounds on which new and appropriate directives will soon be given for more effective and efficient evangelization within the Archdiocese of Onitsha.

Our country and its entire people are at present passing through a phase of national life that can only be described as trying. Nigeria has been blessed with a peaceful transition from one elected government to another since 2015. Since then there has been somewhat a conspiracy of factors which have resulted in serious economic hardship. Our currency has witnessed serious devaluation against all the major currencies of the world. The direct consequence of this is the steep economic impoverishment of the masses of Nigerians. The earnings of most Nigerians have become grossly inadequate to cater for their most basic needs. It is not our desire to allot blames on any specific individual, but it must be kept in mind that the greatest source of our present economic problem is the profligacy of our past and present leadership. We have over the years become a country of importers because our infra structural state makes it impossible for us to manufacture anything of worth. Our country for years resorted to importing everything, spending our hard currency income on importation and not on manufacturing. Our source of hard currency has been for years just oil exploration and export. Our leaders became fixated on this mono economy in spite of the warnings of experts. The global fall of oil price due to over production and the sufficiency of the United States of America in terms of fossil fuel entailed a slashing of the country's foreign currency earnings, and the loss of the backing of our local currency by such earnings. The continued preference of our taste to imported goods entails that the chasing of the much less available foreign currency by so many importers cannot but lead to the natural devaluation of our national currency.

4. We express heartfelt sympathy to all our faithful and other men and women of goodwill who are undergoing this difficult phase of economic recession. Our prayer is that from this experience, the managers of our beloved country will learn to focus attention on what will foster the general good of all their people. It is their divine obligation to do all that is possible to alleviate the terrible economic trauma which the people are passing through. In doing so our leaders should realize that the suffering of the people, the children of God is not an appropriate subject of opportunistic politics, and so they should work together to alleviate 'human suffering.

CHOICE OF TOPIC

5. Aware of these challenges and many others including the rising wave of violence, the threat from terrorists and the attitude of those who have turned politics into a do-or-die battle, we are sending you this pastoral letter on peace. Our exhortation to the faithful is to invest trust in God and his guidance, and never to be despondent on account of hardship. They should eschew rancor and be all the more convinced that faithfulness to God and his ways are the only lasting escape from temporal problems. Each person should try to understand the current situation and where possible make necessary changes, both in personal and communal habits where doing so will bring positive outcome.

Generally, human beings have greater temptation of giving way to violence when their social, political and economic conditions are more difficult than when they are favourable. Such reactions can either come from inner frustration with a situation before which they feel helpless or from the desperate quest to cling to or struggle for material things in view of survival. It therefore goes without saying that our already checkered society is now harbouring the propensity to violence given the reality of threat to life and economic recession.

It is in view of these that I have chosen to reflect on yet another of the eight beatitudes both as a follow up to the reflection of last year and in due regard to the context of our daily life. Our topic for this reflection is therefore Blessed Are the Peacemakers. I do hereby kindly invite all to join me in fertilizing our minds on the nature of peace, its foundation in God, Christ the prince of peace, the promise and task of peace and the challenge of peacemaking for all Christians and men and women of goodwill.

CHAPTER ONE THE NOTION OF PEACE

6. The true meaning of peace is made clearer when we examine the different definitions of the word, clarifications of the concept and follow the evolution of the word. The English word for peace originated from the latin pax. In Roman times the word was understood to mean living in a state of agreement without war and violence. The Stoic Philosopher Marcus Aurelius described peace as “a state of unperturbed tranquility”. The word pax is the latin rendition of Shalom, a Hebrew word or concept found in the Hebrew Scriptures. On its entrance into Hellenistic world, the Greek word eirene, a term for Greek goddess of peace was adopted as its equivalent. Of course, eirene in Greek originally does not exhaust the depth of meaning of shalom. But, beyond its meaning in Greek thought, eirene acquired a spiritual profundity not earlier imagined. (cf. Albert B. Randall, *Strangers on the shore: the Beatitudes*. P. 133).

7. The Stoics understood peace in terms of apatheia-absence of suffering, not influenced by emotions. While, the Epicureans did understand peace to mean ataraxia- that is the absence of pain and mental anxiety. However, historically the real meaning of the word pax has been heavily influenced by both the Greek and Hebrew words. The Hebrew language expresses peace as Shalom which is also generally used in the language for greetings. That it is so used points to the fact that its meaning is much more expansive than simple absence of violence. The Hebrew root of the word slm means “to be complete, to be whole, to be sound.” However, this description harbors no preference for quantitative measurement. Completion or wholeness is therefore not to be taken

statistically. In general Shalom means to live well. In the complete sense therefore Shalom means welfare, prosperity, good health and so on, and includes all other things that are taken to be really favorable to the human being. It is important to note that this general sense of well being is not just material well-being, and not just spiritual. It patterns to the material and spiritual, and to the personal or individual and communal. When Shalom is taken relatively it signifies the relation between different groups of people, persons and families.

8. The Greek word for peace as we have already stated is Eirene. Eirene evolved from the basic material and agricultural application as the goddess of peace where it preferred to prosperity, fertility, and also security, especially of homes. Later it was given a more philosophical and internal meaning by such stoic thinkers as Epictetus. Eirene is one of the several words used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible used by the Jewish people throughout the Greco-Roman world. It is through this translation that the word Eirene came by association to acquire all the rich imagery and nuances that the word Shalom had developed through the history of the Jewish people.

9. The Greek Bible, the Septuagint was the main source of St. Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin - the Vulgate. This association enables the Latin word *pax* to be in turn loaded with the variegated meaning which both Shalom and Eirene shared. *Pax* was no longer understood in the sense of *Pax Romana* which had a strong reference to force or coercion. Thus by the time the Christians of the Latin West were employing the word *pax*, its evolution from the material, the economical, to the internal and thence to a word with beautiful and rich imagery had become complete.

10. The evolution of these three words is a very strong pointer to the comprehensive nature of peace. It is not to be defined merely as an absence of violence. The venerable Fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressed this so clearly in the following definition of peace.

Peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is the effect of righteousness. It is the fruit of the right ordering of things...actualized by thirst-after and ever perfect reign of justice. Peace depends upon circumstances which change, consequently, it is never achieved once and for all but must be built up continually. Peace requires constant effort ... and practice of fraternal love. Peace is also the fruit of love...and derives from the peace of Christ. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no 78.)

Some commentators have described this definition of peace as one which is comprehensive and of permanent value. (of Rene Coste, *The Fostering of Peace*...p. 348).

Furthermore commenting on the definition Rene Coste says that without actually quoting it the council refers to the famous Augustinian definition of peace which has repeatedly featured in Catholic Theology and official pronouncements: "*Pax omnium rerum tranquillitas ordinis*". This literally says that the peace of all things is the tranquility of order. It actually implies according to St Augustine that peace is an inner force of justice and love.

11. The Fathers are well aware that there are so many situations without war which may not be described as peace. Some of these situations may even be more horrendous than outright war. For example, the Pax Romana which guaranteed almost four centuries of peace in ancient Europe “meant purely and simply, the unconditional surrender of the defeated state. A sense of security and an absence of war brought about by Rome's conquests and subjugation of its real or perceived enemies”. (cf. Ronald Musto, *The Catholic Peace Tradition*, p.8). It was a mere semblance of tranquility but a reality of injustice, oppression and misery. (cf. J Cater Swaim, *War, Peace and the Bible*, Maryknoll, Ny, 1982, Pp. 46). The Pax Romana provided co-operation without consent and harmony without justice. It was like a state of slavery maintained by fear and force.

12. The Fathers of the Vatican Council II were also conscious of so many other situations of absence of war or violent hostilities which was not peace. One recalls that the ill-treatment which captured Africans were subjected to in the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade was not a situation of war, but was much worse than many wars both in its cruelty to the individuals captured and its fall-out on the society both directly and indirectly. Because peace can mean different things for different people and some have erroneously claimed or defined peace as what it is not, the Fathers of the council outlined the true meaning of peace by defining what peace is not and what peace cannot be. Peace is holistic, it is total wellbeing, it is shalom. Hence, the constitution says, 'Peace is more than the absence of war... It is the effect of righteousness" (GS, no.78). Also, Pope John XXIII does not view peace as standing alone. In his teachings on peace, he made it clear that peace is the outcome of what is holistically understood. It cannot stand alone. It is as the Hebrew Shalom indicates, a wholeness arising from inner being: “Peace is set in an order founded on truth, built on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom”. (Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 166). This statement highlights four foundations on which genuine peace must rest: namely, TRUTH, JUSTICE, CHARITY and FREEDOM.

13. From all the above, we observe that we have to co-operate with God's grace in order to achieve peace, hence it might not be regarded as solely our achievement- it is more about active reception than self-actualization. It is a gift and a responsibility. We can summarize the meaning of peace as follows, “Peace is the absence of war, the presence of harmony and the positive reign of justice. It is based on reciprocal rights and duties and calls for the promotion of justice and practice of fraternal love. Peace derives from Christ and starts from peace with oneself. It is a gift of God and yet a task to be brought about by human commitment.” (V.M. OKEKE, *Peace in Gaudium et Spes*. 1990, p. 34).

CHAPTER TWO FOUNDATIONS OF PEACE

14. The notion of peace and justice for all is a central theme in the Bible. Also, the awareness of peace as a gift and task is very prominent in both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore we can confidently say that peace is founded on the Sacred Scriptures, on the nature of God and partially on the nature of the human person. Professor B. Haring calls our attention to the fact that “Peace is at the heart of all God's promises and gifts” and God's reign promised by prophets and announced and made visible in Christ tends to abiding peace”. (B. Haring, *Power of Peace and Non Violence*, 1986, p.8).

PEACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:

15. The basic Hebrew word for peace in the Old Testament is Shalom. It is a word with extensive meaning and all embracing content. Shalom includes wholeness of health, soundness, well being and general prosperity (Gen. 15:15; Ps. 4:8), fulfillment, victory, benediction, friendship and kindness, justice, fidelity, success, safety, salvation and harmony (2Sam. 11:7; 18:29; Zech,6:13; 1kings. 4:24,5:12).

In the Old Testament Peace of any kind is a wholeness determined and given by God. It is a state of wholeness possessed by persons or groups which may be health, prosperity, security or the spiritual completeness of the covenant, (cf. E.M. Good, Peace in OT in the interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1984 ed.). In fact shalom includes all the promises of the messianic age. It is God's gift and a gift of stupendous totality. (cf. B. Haring, the Beatitudes, p68.) Accordingly to some experts shalom has up to 25 meanings which range from individual well-being, absence of war and strife or victory over them, peaceful co-existence, group and individual prosperity to personal sanctity.

16. In the Old Testament the word Shalom is used in everyday greetings. Two people meeting each other would usually exchange the wish or greeting-"shalom be with you". And, when this is said, it does not mean "I hope you do not get into any trouble", rather it means, "I hope you have all the highest good that could come your way". We have to note that man's highest good as implied by shalom extends to political. economic, social, personal and communal spheres.

17. However, recall that the Old Testament begins with the story of the journey between God and man. God created this world to be peaceful. But human sin twisted God's creation, so that brokenness now pervades that which God had intended to be peaceful. Yet God has not given up on his creation, nor on his creatures. Thus the Old Testament is full of the records of God's effort to bring back man to the original peace he was created for. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord looked forward to such restoration for his people when he says: "And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and multiply them, and I will put my Temple among them forever. I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people (Ezek. 37: 26-37). For the Old Testament, Peace will come by God's action and man's response. The result will be a mended relationship between people and God. The prophet Isaiah brought the message home when he says: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "your God reigns" (Is. 52:7).

18. That peace was central in the Old Testament was evident from the thoughts, beliefs, practices and desires of the people. The Jews believed that their God was a God of peace. His blessings were peace itself. They prayed to Him for that blessing and wished it to one another. "Peace be within your walls and security within your towers" (Ps. 112:7). Nevertheless, peace is unthinkable without obedience to the law of God. It was the responsibility of the chosen people to live and act in positive response to the laws and ordinances which God has promulgated. It is through total obedience to these instructions that the peace which is God's gift to the people would depend.

Therefore, faithfulness to the law and righteousness are indispensably connected to peace. This explains why we see in many parts of the Old Testament such statements like: Great peace have those who love your law, nothing can make them stumble” (Ps. 119:165); “there is no peace for the wicked says the Lord (Is:48:22), "you will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you" (Is. 26:3). It is clear that for the people of the Old Testament, peace was seen as a gift of God to be accessed through man's obedience to the laws of God.

Also for the chosen people, God's own time will be manifested by, His Messiah who himself was the prince of peace of whose government and peace there shall be no end. Peace was the expected final word in revelation. Peace was God's own time and the reign of His Messiah. Peace was man's longing and yearning for both this life and in the life to come. Peace was God's greatest gift and expected promise. (cf. V. M. Okeke, Peace, p. 48).

In all we can affirm the strong Biblical Foundations of peace and the centrality of the gift and task of peace in the Old Testament.

PEACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

19. The prophets consistently presented God as a God of justice and peace. God does not love violence nor does he need wars to carry out his wishes. Such prophets like Isaiah, Hosea, Micah were unanimous in predicting the day of the Lord which would usher in peace and tranquility. For Isaiah, Emmanuel the Messiah, is the future Prince of peace. The Messianic Kingdom would be a state of peace, a state of material and spiritual well-being . "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, ! Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... His in Government and peace there will be no end. He will rule with justice forever, (Is. 9:6-7).

20. In the New Testament Christ presented himself as the awaited Messiah and the fulfillment of the prophetic promises. The central message of the New Testament is that the peace God intended for creation which was once lost because of sin and which was often promised by the prophets has been re-established by God through Jesus by "his blood on the cross". For this reason Paul simply defined peace in terms of a person, the person of Jesus Christ: “He Himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:14).

At the birth of Jesus Christ, the Angels announced the event with the song, 'Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth Peace among men’.... (Lk. 2:11). Then at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ was giving the sacred book, He opened and read the passage: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, the Lord has anointed me..." (Lk. 4:18). He concluded by explaining to his audience that the said scripture passage was being fulfilled in Him (Lk.4:21). There is no doubt that Christ was seeing Himself as the fulfillment of the prophetic promises about the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Anointed One with the spirit of God, who would “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1:79).

21. Jesus saw himself as the custodian and dispenser of God's peace which he did not hesitate to distribute through forgiveness of sins (Lk7:50) and healing of infirmities (Lk. 8:48). He could confidently say, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you."(Jn.1 4:27). We know that through the mystery of the incarnation, Christ shares in our human nature. Through the same mystery he elevates us to participate in the divine nature. Now having accorded us the divine nature through the incarnation, Christ further proclaims that the way to properly merit the name Son of God with him is by being peace makers (Mtt. 5:9). Consequently peace has firm foundations in the New Testament and in the person of Christ.

Philosophical and Anthropological Foundations of Peace:

22. Man desires peace by nature. The human person seeks peace and fulfillment always. Though ultimate or complete peace is found in God, one who has achieved peace in the sense of shalom in this world could be said to have achieved uninjured wholeness. One who lacks peace then suffers from incompleteness and lack of fulfillment to the degree of his lack. Since nature abhors a vacuum, peacelessness creates a vacuum in man thereby urging him to seek completeness through seeking peace. Humans share the same existential fate. They endure physical pain when faced by the same circumstances. They suffer or experience the same human emotions, passion, desire for love acceptance, joy and fulfillment. Humans irrespective of colour or creed enjoy the same hierarchy of values the highest of which is happiness. But to achieve deep and meaningful happiness is to be at peace. Since all humans desire happiness, it could be rightly said that all men by nature desire peace. Consequently, the propensity towards peace is in the nature of humans. As such peace has anthropological foundations.

CHAPTER THREE BLESSED TRINITY: THE SOURCE OF PEACE.

23. It could be argued that the central theme which sums up the covenants both Old and New is peace. The messianic title of "Prince of Peace" (Is.9:6) and the Pauline reference to Christ as "Our peace" (Eph. 2:14) remind us that if Christ is the Prince of peace then God is the Father of peace and the Holy spirit is the spirit of peace having come from the Father and the Son.

We have established that peace is a gift from God and a responsibility on the part of man. Every individual experience of peace rests, at its base, upon the peacemaking work of God through Christ in the Spirit. Knowing peace each day therefore has its root in the saving work of God. According to Psalm 29:11, "the Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses his people with peace". St. Paul reiterates the fact that God is the source of peace when he prayed for all Christians: "May the Lord of peace himself always give you peace no matter what happens" (2 Thess. 3:16). Hence, Divine peace, whether in our hearts or in our relationships, comes from the hand of God. In the words of St. John Paul II, "peace comes from God as its foundation: it is a gift of God... yes indeed, God is the source of peace: He calls to peace, he safeguards it, and he grants it as the fruit of justice. Moreover, God helps us interiorly to achieve peace or to recover it" (John Paul II, Peace: A gift of God entrusted to us, message for the world day of peace, January 1, 1982, N.4). Indeed our peace comes from God, He is the source of our peace.

THE FATHER AS THE GOD OF PEACE

24. The Holy Trinity is a mystery of peace and love. The three persons in one God is a perfect display of unity and peace. Without peace the Trinity cannot hold and cannot be a possibility. God is therefore God of peace. From the Scriptures, God the Father of peace created the world as a place of peace. He intended man to enjoy justice, harmony and fellowship both with him and with one another. Until the end of the book of Genesis chapter 2, peace prevailed in God's good creation. God alone was the source of peace. He established with our first parents a covenant of peace, which was sealed with his presence. Adam and Eve were given perfect peace so long as they maintained a right relationship with God.

25. The creation accounts in Genesis reveal this peaceful dimension of God's masterpiece. The right relationship between God and Adam was evident from God's generous provision for Adam and his complete obedience to God's command (Gen. 2:18-25). When God created a female companion for the man, the relationship of peace remained between the man and his companion as well as God. They shared fellowship without shame as great peace of innocence filled their souls.

26. Unfortunately, this beautiful song of peace did not last too long. Adam and Eve could not remain in this perfect state of peace due to their disobedience. They were kicked out of paradise and as a consequence, they ruined everything for themselves and the rest of creation. They disrupted the peace of God's entire creation. As they disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6), their peacefulness was shattered and they felt shame and guilt. When God came to fellowship with them, they were ashamed of themselves, they tried to hide from God as sin had destroyed the perfect peace they enjoyed.

27. However, though peace was destroyed in the fall of man, God the creator of peace remains the same forever. God did not give up on his creation, he immediately made a promise to mend the broken peace. And, he fulfilled that promise by sending his beloved son, the Prince of Peace into the world.

JESUS CHRIST: THE PRINCE OF PEACE:

28. The Apostle Paul makes it clear in unambiguous terms that "Christ is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). Peace is the principle of harmonious existence with self, God and others and at the same time it is the person of Jesus Christ, the symbol of God and God- incarnate. Pope John XXIII clearly proclaims the long-standing desire for peace in the deepest recesses of all men. He regrets that this quest has for so long not been fulfilled, and he affirmed that it "can never be established, never guaranteed except by the diligent observance of divinely established order". This divinely established order finds its fulfillment in Christ, our Savior. We have earlier explained how in the Hebrew and Greek words for peace, the sense of wholeness of being is projected. Peace is no longer only material, not merely visible in external realities. It is this wholeness that is very evident in Christ, the author of peace and prince of peace. By bequeathing on us the ultimate wholeness, Christ has simultaneously accorded us the peace of soul. Salvation becomes the ultimate destiny of peace-seeking human beings, and this salvation is to be found only in Christ. He is therefore in

a veritable fashion the peace that we seek. “Peace on earth, which flows from love of one's neighbor, symbolizes and derives from the peace of Christ who proceeds from God the Father. Christ, the word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, and, restoring the unity of all in one people and one body, he abolished hatred in his own flesh” (Gaudium et Spes, no 78).

29. The birth of the author of peace was marked by special proclamations about peace. Zachariah the Father of John the Baptist proclaimed a canticle in which he asserted the role of his son as the precursor to him who would announce love, salvation and then guide our feet into the way of peace (Lk. 1:76-79). The shepherds to whom the birth was announced became privilege to hear the songs of the angels: glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of goodwill (Lk.2:13-14)

The sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:1-10), and on the plain (Lk. 6:20-45), were combined with the instruction on the love of enemies (Matt, 5:38-48). This command on the love of enemies encapsulates and epitomizes Christ's teaching on peacemaking. For Pope Benedict XVI, “love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the Christian revolution”. It means that at the heart of Christian revolution is peacemaking since love of enemy is the highest level of self-denial, of humility, of forbearance and indeed of fraternity. Christ's injunction to love enemies which he manifests so majestically on the cross (Father forgive them...), is a strong recognition of the oneness of humanity in God and of their participation in the mystical body of Christ. The peace of Christ is therefore a shining example that should be self-manifest to all Christians.

30. It is therefore not surprising that peace is his parting gift to his disciples. It is not just peace but His own peace, peace that the world cannot give (cf. John, 14:27). Their hearts should therefore not be troubled and they should not be afraid. He has laid down his life for love and there is truly no greater love that can be imagined. This love is productive of peace and the assurance that the savior is really with us and for us. He is therefore the Prince of peace. Our God is God of peace (Rom. 15:33). He bestows peace through his son, Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:20). This Christ has broken down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles and thus brought peace to both. Jesus is veritably our peace. He is our peace, who hath made both Jews and Gentiles one... And coming He preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to them that are near (Eph. 2:14-17). Christ is our model. Our life modeled on the life of Christ will bring us peace.

PEACE: THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

31. We may recall as earlier stated that Jesus promised to give his followers a supernatural peace the peace which the world cannot give. He also urged them not to be afraid (cf. Jn. 14:27). After Jesus ascended to heaven, he gives this peace through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. He sent them the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost day and peace is one aspect of that which the Holy Spirit produces in our lives (cf. Gal. 5:22).

When the Spirit dwells in us and works in us, he produces a set of christlike qualities called fruits of the Holy Spirit. One of such fruits is peace. When we allow the spirit to live and act in us as well as through us, we are transformed. One can now grow spiritually, truly walk in the Spirit and

manifest the characteristics of transformed Christian life: peace, joy, love forgiveness, self control...

32. Peace is a state of assurance, lack of fear, and a sense of contentment. It includes fellowship, harmony, and unity between individuals and between man and God. Someone who is not in a good relationship with God is in a state of unrest because of sin. He is not peaceful in heart, soul and mind because they are in opposition to the Lord (cf. Rom 8:6). Such a person does not have the Spirit of God, the God of peace within him (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23), Once a person repents and accepts Christ as his Lord, he receives the Spirit and is granted peace. This peace comes from having his sins forgiven and the privilege of having a good relationship with his Heavenly Father.

33. St Paul, in his letter, advised the Philippians, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). The above gives us a glimpse to the peace of God. It is beyond human understanding. Such peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When one is out of fellowship with the God of peace, his spirit will be absent and one will lack peace.

St. Paul while writing to the Galatians addresses the conflict between the spirit and flesh (cf. Gal. 5:18-22). When a Christian allows the word of God to dwell and operate in him, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit will manifest in him. Peace from God is one of these fruits. While when the spirit is absent, lack of peace would be felt. When the spirit rules our lives we enjoy godly peace. Truly peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and the Blessed Trinity is the source of peace. Therefore to achieve peace independent of God is difficult.

CHAPTER FOUR PEACE AND THE CHALLENGES OF WAR

34. The venerable Fathers of the Vatican Council II recommend to all men and women of goodwill that a complete fresh appraisal of war must of necessity be undertaken. While quoting the Holy Father John XXIII, they insist that in this age of ours, which prides itself upon its atomic power, it is irrational to think that war is a proper way to obtain justice for violated rights (cf. GS. no 80).

35. Pope John XXIII asserts in the opening paragraph of his encyclical on peace-Pacem in Terris, that the human being has longed for and sought after peace for so long and that this is so is directly from the nature of his being. It goes without saying that no one really wants war or strife if the consequences are clearly visible to him. It is clear that there are people who would like to sacrifice themselves for a cause of action, or to become instruments of violence against others. But all so often such mindless undertakings are based on a promise of bliss or fulfillment of some sort. It is basically because human beings have failed to understand the principles which Pacem In Terris outlined, that war or violence continues to be options for them. Fundamentally, the situation of war starts from the inner being of the agent of war. “World wars are only projections of the conflicts waged inside the souls of modern men and women, for nothing happens in the external

world that has not first happened within the soul” (cf. F. Sheen, *Peace of Soul*, 1997, p. 1) while locating world wars within the soul of the human being, their effects are however clearly experienced outside the soul. That is why we still continue to experience war all over the world. The world which experienced two world wars within a period of less than thirty years has since then (1945) not had another world war. But this fact should not make us to be less aware of the ravages of so many wars. Because these wars are smaller than the two world wars, it is often presumed to be smaller events. Pope Francis message to the world Day of Peace for 2017 states that “Today sadly, we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal”. (cf. Pope Francis, *Non Violence a Style of Politics for Peace*, no. 2).

36. World wars fought piecemeal captures the implication and ravages engendered by so many wars in the world. These horrifying catastrophes are better experienced from the point of view of those whose lives are messed up because of the so called small wars. From an individual point of view, one who loses his life in a small war is exactly the same as one who loses his life in the biggest world war. From the communal point of view, the ravages that are engendered to human communities, to towns, to the structure of human life are not less horrendous than the one experienced during the world wars. That is why for the Pope, piecemeal violence is as destructive as global wars.

37. The experience of wars in our African continent puts paid any inclination to minimize the ravages of war. From the wars of independence in Algeria, Mozambique, Namibia and today in Western Sahara, one remembers the horrible civil wars that left behind stupendously negative consequences. We recall the Biafra war in which up to a million innocent civilians were starved to death by Nigerian boycott, not to mention uncountable others killed by bombs and air-strikes on churches and markets, and the bullets of soldiers. The war between different political parties in Angola led to the death of thousands of people and after, fields of unidentifiable land mines shopping off the limbs of innocent people. The Democratic Republic of Congo has been an endless theatre of wars which have succeeded in virtually winding back all development process in that rich country. Civil war in Rwanda succeeded in massacring hundreds of thousands of Tutsi citizens and moderate Hutus- in a war that should be judge as a shame to the whole of modern humanity. In South Africa , years of Apartheid and the war of liberation created enormous human problems that till date have resisted any meaningful effort towards their solution. Today Somalia has virtually ceased to be a nation with the Al Shabab terrorism defying control or destruction. Eritrea fought a terrible war of independence against Ethiopia, but at the end a dictatorial regime has dug into the socio-polity and no one sees the end in sight.

38. The rumbles of war are also heard in Asia.

The Poll Pot regime in Cambodia massacred up to two million of the citizens of the country on account of queer and murderous ideology. Indian and Pakistani Kashmir has not known peace since those big countries separated at independence. The Philippines have not had real peace since the separatist Islamic terrorists group started their wars in some of the Islands of the country. In Afghanistan, the Taliban Islamists refuse to be beaten and are ready to take any number of casualties in the guise of religious war. In the middle East the protracted war between Israel and the Palestine does not seem to have a hopeful end given the recalcitrance of the parties who are in position to bring the region to peace. In nearby Syria, the attempt to topple the Assad regime has

turned the country into a virtual hell with millions of its citizens either displaced or in quest of more peaceful regions of refuge in the world. The Iraq invasion of Kuwait and the American intervention has left behind a country that is now marked by repeated bomb blasts with attendant casualties by the international terrorist group ISIS. In Turkey, the Kurds are still fighting for their independence and against their domination by the Turkish government. This is the world today. These and many other instances of war and violent conflicts adequately substantiate Pope Francis' assertion of piecemeal world wars. As Archbishop Sheen said, they are all manifestations of the absence of peace of soul. They underline the importance of the quest for peace. However, Pope Francis reminds us that everybody can be an artisan of peace (cf. Francis, world Day of Peace message, January 2017, no 7). In the face of all these hostilities, violence, wars and challenges to peace, the promise and task of Christ in the beatitudes become more relevant, that "Blessed are the peace makers..." (Matt. 5:9).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE QUESTION OF PEACE AND WAR.

39. The Church has always emphasized that "if peace is to be established, the first condition is to root out the causes of discord among men which lead to wars" (Gaudium et Spes, no 83). Despite the fact that the famous just war theory is a theory that was originated and developed by several thinkers of the Catholic Church, it still goes without saying that peacemaking is an integral part of Catholic Social Teaching. Reflections on peace cannot therefore be complete without discussing the rationale of the view of the Church on war and her growing march towards non violence.

In the first place, the early Church was clearly inclined toward pacifism. This is seen clearly from a statement of the famous theologian Clement of Alexandria. "If you enroll as one of God's people, heaven is your country and God Your lawgiver. And what are the laws? You shall not kill, you love your neighbor as yourself. To

Who strikes you on one cheek turn to him the other also" (Protrepticus, 10). The background to this statement is that the early Church believed that Christians should not bear arms in wars. This engendered a tension between their then conviction as Christians and their obligation to be responsible and well regarded citizens of their society. The tension was not made less poignant by the issue of whether it was right for Christians to take up arms in defense of one's country or community. This was the time when Christians were still living on the fringes of the Roman society, and also being persecuted. With the triumph of Constantine in 313 AD, Christianity gradually became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Barbarian invasion was to follow not long after, and the concrete situation of defense of one's country virtually became a challenge and nearly put an end to the inclination toward pacifism.

40. Pacifism was not however put to rest. Ambrose of Milan who himself was a soldier before being the Archbishop of Milan maintained the conviction of many early Christians against the use of violence "unless it was needed to protect important social values". This position in effect set the outline of the dominant teaching of the Church thinkers on just war. Ambrose argued that the demand of charity dictates that one should take up arms to protect one's neighbor. "He who does not ward off injury from his comrade, where he is able to do so, is just as

guilty as he who does the injury” (cf. Eileen Egan, *Peace be with you*, 2004). Ambrose was one of the earliest practitioners of non violent resistance. Thus when the Empress Justina wanted to hand over the Milanese Basilica to the Arians, Ambrose organized a sit in in the Church with some of his faithful.

41. St. Augustine of Hippo was another Catholic thinker who helped to develop the just war theory. Augustine was of the view that order and empire was preferable to chaos and that the "Survival of Christianity was tied up with the fate of the empire". In his view defense should be understood as a means of preserving peace, and thus pacifism does not prevent the defense of the innocent. He went on to add other conditions that were to serve as frame work for the Catholic just war theory, stating three conditions; war must be waged under the authority of a ruler, the conduct of war must be just, and the clergy must not participate in war. (cf. T.J. Massaro and T. A Shannon, *Catholic Perspective on Peace and War*, 2003).

42. Thomas Aquinas based on the thought of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, further outlined what could be called the standard statement of just war theory. For Aquinas, “war must be declared by the authority of the state; there must be just cause; the intention must be just; war must be the last resort; only right means may be employed in the conduction of war; there must be reasonable hope of victory; and the good to be achieved must outweigh the evils of war". (Massaro and Shannon, p. 12).

43. There were other modifications of the just war theory but all of them are in consonance with the outline developed by Ambrose, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. It is however to be noted that there is a remarkable difference between wars in the time of the Medieval Church and the modern times. That explains why Pope John XXIII sounded a clearly different tone in his pastoral document *Pacem in Terris*. He contextualizes the different circumstances of war in the following terms: “Men nowadays are becoming more and more convinced that any dispute which may arise between nations must be resolved by negotiation and agreement and not by recourse to arms”. (*Pacem in Terris*, no 126).

44. The difference in context is squarely the massive progress science and technology have achieved and the application of this progress in developing destructive weapons of war. In today's world, all the talks of distinction between combatants and non-combatants are made quasi meaningless on account of the extent of destruction that weapons of war can unleash. It becomes necessary therefore to contextualize the theory of war and to affirm that the theory can hardly be applicable under today's reality. The Pope writes “In this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice (*Pacem in Terris*, no 127).

If the present reality is one that dictates that war an no longer be the privileged means of settling dispute, it means that serious reconsiderations ould creep into the issue of war, especially its justification. The Fathers of Vatican II devote chapter 5 of *Gaudium et Spes* to the issue of war and peace. The Fathers assert that the common good of mankind derives ultimately from eternal law, still it “depends in the concrete circumstances which change as time goes on. Consequently, peace

will never be achieved once and for all, but must be built up continually” (GS. No. 78) The Fathers had no illusion about the state of peace in the concrete world. In their view in so far as human being remain sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and this will continue till the parousia. But given that they can unite in conquering sin, violence will also be conquered as they listen to the exhortation to beat their sword into ploughshares. However they refer to the savagery of modern warfare and condemn in very clear terms the “extermination of an entire race, nation, or ethnic minority”. (GS. No 79). The right of legitimate self-defiance is upheld, but the destruction of whole cities or areas with their inhabitants is described as a crime against God and humanity. *Gaudium et Spes* finally envisions the total banning of wars, but regrets that this would not be possible until a time that the world is able to establish a “universally acknowledge authority vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for law”. (GS. No 82).

45. It is in view of all these reviews of the just war theory that Pope Francis message for the World Day of Peace for January 2017 become very understandable. The document comes with title, “Nonviolence, a style of politics for peace”. The message takes a clue from Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr. It defines non violence as when victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate. Doing so they become promoters of non-violent peacemaking. The Pope prays that non-violence would become the hallmark of our actions and decisions especially in personal relationships, in politics and all our actions. He thus sees non-violence as not just limited to the issue of war. Non-violence brings peace to all nooks and crannies of our lives and thus the family is for him the bedrock of its inculcation into the life of all. “The politics of non-violence has to begin in the home and then spread to the entire human family”. (Francis, Non-Violence, no 5).

46. Pope Francis sees non-violence, not as mere passivity. It is the power of a Christian who reposes confidence in God's power and love. "For Christians, non-violence is not merely tactical behavior but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone". (Francis, Non-Violence, no 3).

47. What is clear in this very brief survey of Catholic tradition on war and peace is that right from the onset there developed a serious distrust of violence and use of arms as a means of getting justice. The pacifist tendencies of the early Church filtered into the just war theory which sets very high standard for those engaged in war. Indeed the standards of the just war theory are so high that they become almost impossible to put into practice. This clearly indicates the predilection for peace in the minds of Catholic thinkers. In modern times when many destructive weapons have been developed, and the respect of non-combatants rendered an uphill task, the distrust for war and violence has become even more heightened. While *Pacem in Terris* disavows the use of war to settle issue of justice, *Gaudium et Spes* broaches the total abolition of war, and Pope Francis speaks so loudly of nonviolent peacemaking.

CHAPTER SIX DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEACE

48. We have already mentioned while discussing the notion of peace that peace as a word and a concept is holistic, overwhelming embracing and excludes absolute precision. We shall therefore discuss the dimensions or different aspects of peace. This will further show the multidimensional aspect of peace as it touches the individual, the groups and the wider community.

DIVINE PEACE:

49. Divine peace is a tremendous gift from God mostly to his children who have deep faith in Him. It is a positive gift which accompanies our living in harmony with God's plan. It is the foundation of every other type of peace. The Scripture tells us that in God's will is our peace. The will of God is the will of our loving Father who created us, who knows us, who fashioned us in our mother's womb and in the words of the prophet Isaiah "who holds us always in the palm of His hand" (Is. 49:16). It is the will of God that we should have peace. Consequently when a man sincerely accepts the will of God, he is united with Jesus who says, "my food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work" (Jn.4:34).

When one reaches this level of acceptance of and resignation to God's will, the peace of God will reign in his life. He will always be disposed to accept divine providence and even when he faces challenges in life outwardly, he would inwardly enjoy satisfaction, serenity, tranquility and peace which comes from God.

INNER PEACE:

50. Inner peace has foundation on the peace of God and related to it. However, it can be described as the type of peace that is unrelated to circumstances. It is often called the peace of mind. It is the tranquility of life that is not touched by what happens on the outside. It is such peace that made Paul to say that he could be contended in any circumstance. He demonstrated that he had peace even in jail at Philippi when he sang songs of thanksgiving to God (cf. Acts. 16:16-34). Paul did not hesitate to share that inner peace by converting the prison official and his family to accept Christ.

Inner peace is a state of mental and emotional calmness. It excludes fear and worries. Fear often generates conflicts in our life and relationships. Such fear may indicate lack of faith or absence of the Spirit. Inner peace is that type which Paul described when he advised the Philippians not to be anxious about anything but to pray at all circumstances and the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will fill their heart and minds (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

FRATERNAL PEACE:

51. Fraternal peace can be described as peace between brothers when by brother we mean other human beings around us. It is based on the philosophy that we are all from the same Father who is God, and redeemed by Christ, therefore we are all brothers and sisters. St Paul described this type of peace when he says that "Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by

making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups.

Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death". (Eph. 2:14-16). Christ died to reconcile us to God, reconciliation between individuals and God as well as with one another. When we are waging wars with each other in our families and social groups it shows absence of fraternal peace. Fraternal peace is being at peace with the other.

CIVIL PEACE

52. Civil peace comes from good governance. When good rulers, generally God-fearing ones apply good principles of leadership among their citizens civil peace prevails.

Civil peace is realized when the leaders are there to serve their people while the people respond positively to the demands of the common good. It is a type of peace that exists when the leaders and the led are faithful to their vocation in the society.

UNIVERSAL PEACE

53. The bible has a vision of universal peace when all the nations will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn war anymore (cf. Is. 2:2-4).

Universal peace is therefore a time when all nations will be at peace, justice, truth, righteousness and love will reign. We are looking forward to this universal peace either now or in the parousia-the world to come.

CHAPTER SEVEN PEACE IN THE CURRENT STATE OF NIGERIA

54. Every human person desires peace. In the same way every human community is in need of peace to live well and to make necessary progress in improving their environment. Thus peace is a desideratum for all humans both as individuals and as communities. The ravages of war all over the world are a sure reminder that peace where it is found is a treasure to be cherished and preserved. If all other societies need peace, the Nigerian society needs it all the more. Its quickest and surest way of obtaining peace is listening to the Good News and taking the teaching seriously. Nigeria is reputed to be a very religious society. But it would not be useful if this reputation ends in mere adherence to this or that faith or denomination. Every religion in a way proclaims the message of peace, but all too often there are too many members of each religion that misunderstand the message of the spirit of peace and are willing to turn their faith to violence. Pope Francis in an address at the world Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi said: "the name of God not be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy not war". If Nigerian believers are aware of this simple admonition then peace will be greatly fostered in our lives.

55. To do so we need to practice brotherly love and eschew discrimination of all sorts. All too often Nigerians are asked their State and local government of origin not to ensure equitable distribution of employment and resources but as a prelude to discriminations. One hopes that such discriminations would be discouraged. Discriminating against fellow citizens does not make for national coherence and consequently does not empower peace. Our constitution tries to obviate discrimination at the national level by calling for Federal character in appointments. But sometimes such rules are kept in the breach. One may refer to the present government of Nigeria in which the first 30 very key appointments were made without including anybody from the South East. It is our view that such actions may not be accidental, and they do not foster peace and a sense of belonging.

56. The fostering of human rights is a very sore sue in the whole nation. It is easy today to forget that Boko Haram which has led to the death of thousands of people in all parts of Nigeria, ignited its violence when its leader was killed extra-judicially. From that moment, the group increased their armed conflict and has become the second most deadly terrorist group in the world. Very recently, Amnesty international issued a report of how hundreds of unarmed Biafran protesters were gunned down by the Nigerian police. Till today the Federal Government is yet to make any serious statement about that damning report. The same could be said of the reported massacre of the Shiite believers in Kaduna State and the massacre of innocent citizens mostly Christians in 2016 in the Southern part of Kaduna. Such flaunting of human rights does nothing but increase the level of violence in the polity.

Peace is also not fostered by the inequitable distribution of public benefit. We refer in particular to the issues of corruption in our public life. The public life is meant for service for one's fellow citizens. Its main reward is not in acquisition but in the sacrifice dispensed in the quest of the benefit of other people. Our Country is fast acquiring a culture of corruption where mind-bugling sums are starched away from the common treasury, thereby increasing the poverty of the people and again creating a situation where there is absence of peace.

57. The same can be said of the services the government is providing for the public. Very often such services are so paltry or completely non-existent. There is for instance hardly any town in Nigeria where public water supply is functioning well. Almost all Nigerians have to provide their own drinking water and then source their own water for home chores. This is only one example. The absence of such services to the populace of our society does not contribute to peace. Our country is one where in most human affairs, everybody caters for himself, making a mockery of governance and public service.

CHAPTER EIGHT TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE.

58. We have earlier stated the foundations on which genuine peace must rest according to the teachings of the Church. These include Truth, Justice, Charity and Freedom. (cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 166)

On these pillars or foundations, Christians and in fact all other men and women of goodwill can build a culture of peace. These are conditions for a culture of peace:

59. 1. TRUTH: Seeking and upholding the truth always promotes peace. The Gospel states, “you will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John, 8:32). This means that the liar is one under bondage. The liar is not free; His speech and his acts are contrary to his intentions. A lie is often defined as “speech contrary to the mind with the intention of deceiving”. The reason for this is that truth involves knowledge and knowledge is the basis of all actions. It is most often the inability to recognize the truth that lead to conflict among individuals, communities and nations. Since nobody desires what he does not know, ignorance can also lead people astray. In the words of St. John Paul II, there is no peace without readiness for sincere and continual dialogue. Truth too requires dialogue... truth causes minds to come together; it shows what already unites the parties that were previously opposed; it causes the mistrust of yesterday to decrease, and prepares the ground for fresh advances in justice and brotherhood and in the peaceful co-existence of all human beings. (cf. John Paul II, Truth: The Power of Peace, Jan 1, 1980). There is nothing that nurtures violence like falsehood, lies and ignorance, while truth fosters peace.

59. 2. JUSTICE: Upholding Justice leads to peace. The presence of justice in the human society does not mean that all the problems of inadequacy are thereby resolved. But it assures the bearers of hardship that their plight is not on account of the greed or rapacity of their fellow human beings. Justice is the root of the civil Society, and no reasonable peace can exist without justice.

Thomas Aquinas defines justice as giving each person his due. Justice is the root of all virtues. It is the “raison d’etre” of the social and political order. It is the foundation on which all social institutions of the society rest. St. Augustine affirms the importance of justice by saying “without justice, what is a state but a band of rubbers”. (City of God, bk 4 ch. 4). It means that without justice there is no way peace can be obtained. This includes personal peace and communal peace. The absence of justice is the cause of many wars. It is also the cause of disagreement, difficulties, rancor and strife between individuals. Peace and justice are like twins who always go together. They are like two sides of the same coin. For the Psalmist, justice and Peace will always kiss each other (Ps. 85:10) while for the Prophet Isaiah, the effect of justice will be peace and the result of justice is quietness and security forever, (Is. 32:17).

59. 3. CHARITY: Practicing love or Christian charity is not only an integral aspect of peacemaking, it is in itself generative of more love. The philosopher Spinoza says that “love tends to beget love”, and to hate is to acknowledge our inferiority and our fear. Where there is more love there is more peace. No wonder Pacem in Terris informs us that love is one of the foundations of peace. The central principle of Christianity is the Golden Rule. It entails the recognition that we humans are all children of the same creator and Father, and that we are all brothers and sisters. Therefore, treat others as you would wish to be treated by them. Again, through our adoption in Christ, we form one body with Christ. Hence, I am the vine you are the branches, (Jn. 15:5). These are telling considerations why the Christian and all people of goodwill should not be oblivious of the duty of charity; treating the other with compassion and with mercy. It is only so that lasting peace can be achieved among humans. Gaudium et Spes assures us that peace is the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can ensure. (cf. GS. no. 78). “Only a humanity in which there

reigns the "civilization of love" will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace". (John Paul II, *An ever timely Commitment: Teaching Peace*. Jan. 1, 2004 no. 10).

59. 4. **FREEDOM:** Responsible use of freedom leads to peace. The desire to exercise our freedom implies allowing others to do the same. Respecting fellow human beings is in a way respecting ourselves since we are all from one source and have one origin. To respect fellow human beings is also to respect and acknowledge their creator, their God, our God.

God's gift of freedom or rational nature to the human being entails that the human is a free being. It means that he has the power to decide on what to do and to take responsibility for his action. The gift of freedom is by no means the license to do whatever one likes. The proper deployment of human freedom is a necessary condition for the existence of peace. It entails the capacity to choose what is good for human well being, but also the ability to allow other human beings to exercise their own free will. Peace is therefore never a product of force or domination. Those who have been deprived of their freedom live ever in the quest for it. The agent of domination must necessarily sleep with one eye open lest his architecture of force be overthrown. Respecting the legitimate rights and freedom of others promote peace.

59. 5. **AVOIDING GREED:** Greed is excessive love for material and worldly things. Greed is one reason why human beings deliberately put themselves in situations of personal conflict with their fellow human beings. Without greed, there will be much less violence and discontent in the world. Greed is one of the seven capital sins. It leads to other vices that bring lack of peace. When we avoid greed we build a culture of peace.

59. 6. **HUMILITY:** This quality or state of being humble, meek or modest is a promoter of peace. Without humility, peace is difficult. Humility controls our pride. Humility is a virtue that helps one to accept the responsibility of his mistakes and asks for forgiveness. St. Paul counsels all men to be humble and gentle (Eph. 4:2). He goes on to say, Do not think too highly of yourself... (Phil 2:3) Humility enables us to remember that others can sometimes be right and we could sometimes be wrong.

39. 7. **AVOIDING VIOLENCE:** Since violence is one of the sharpest contraries of peace, no one who is in love with violence can be an agent of peace. Those who are victims of violence become humiliated and bitter, they become susceptible to their own violence and thus violence increase hatred. Pope Francis in his message for the world Day of Peace 2017 urges all to cultivate a culture of non-violence as a style of politics for peace. (cf. Pope Francis, *Non violence: A style of politics for peace*, Jan 1, 2017, no. 1)

Developing an attitude of non violence helps us build a culture of peace. Avoiding violence will include seeking better ways of resolving problems and responding to conflicts. Hence the virtues of patience, mercy and forgiveness necessarily come to play significant roles. My 2016 pastoral letter on mercy reminds us that mercy is kind or forgiving Treatment of someone who could be treated harshly. (cf. *Blessed are the merciful*, no. 7). And, Pope John Paul II, tells us that there is

no peace without forgiveness (cf. John Paul II, An ever timely commitment: Teaching Peace, Jan. 1, 2004, no. 10).

59. 8. PRAYER OR PUTTING GOD FIRST: The foundations of peace are clear pointers to the fact that peace cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. God is the source and origin of all we have and are. We must therefore start all that we do from that spiritual realm. If we do so then we become automatically united in peace with God himself who is peace since matter divides and spirit unities.

We have repeatedly said that peace is ultimately a gift from God. If a gift, then it should be humbly sought for through prayers and petitions. Prayer becomes the principal setting in which the work of peace occurs. It is only God's grace that guarantees true and lasting peace. God's grace will enable us to genuinely love, be humble, patient, compassionate, merciful, forgiving and just.

Therefore, through prayer we achieve personal peace as well as become agents of peace. Again, through prayer we fulfill a Christian duty of peacemaking which is our privileged responsibility to invoke God's peace upon the world, the Church and individuals. The Bible provides ample examples of such powerful intercessions. Abraham prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah and through that intervention saved Lot his nephew. Moses interceded for Israel before God following the Golden calf incident (Exodus 33:11-14). Aaron prayerfully ran through the camp of Israel with a smoking censer (a symbol of the prayers of the saints), following another of Israel's rebellion that greatly disturbed the peace between them and God (Numbers 16:44-50). In each case God relented and had mercy on his people. We may probably never know with certainty how much our prayers contribute or affect the course of peace or how much others gained as a result of our intercession, but we should find comfort knowing that we have done at least this much towards making peace. Prayer contributes to the culture of peace.

CHAPTER NINE

CALLED TO BE AGENTS OF PEACE PEACEMAKING: A VOCATION.

60. The life of peace is a basic human desire. This desire comes from human nature. Pope John Paul II tells us that "To work for peace is the concern of all individuals and of all peoples. And because everyone is endowed with a heart and with reason and has been made in the image of God, he or she is capable of the effort of truth and sincerity which strengthens peace" (John Paul II, Truth: the Power of Peace, Jan 1, 1980, no 10). The Pontiff further commenting on the passage in the sermon on the mount about God's special blessing on peacemakers states, "How could this saying, which is a summons to work in the immense field of peace, find such a powerful echo in the human heart if it did not correspond to an irrepressible yearning and hope dwelling within us"... (John Paul II, An Ever Timely Commitment, Jan. 1, 2004). The Pope goes on to ask, why else would peacemakers be called Children of God, if not because God is by nature the God of peace. Therefore based on his nature from creation, the human person has an irresistible inclination towards peace. Everyone has a vocation, a call to be a peacemaker. This basic desire and irrepressible yearning for peace is common to all humans, all children of God. It is more so in the

life of Christians called to proclaim and live the Gospel of peace, the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “our peace” (Eph.2:14).

While writing to the Christians in Rome, St. Paul urges them, “As much as depends on you, live in peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18). Also, writing to the Ephesians, Paul commands them to be worthy of the vocation to which they are called by keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4:1-3). Consequently making peace is a special vocation of Christians.

61. We recall that in the sacraments especially in the sacrament of reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist, we celebrate the peace of God, receive peace, exchange the kiss of peace and are sent forth to go and be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace. Hence, it is an invitation and a mandate to peace. Peacemaking is a vocation to all Christians, all men of goodwill, and all children of God. It is a work to be continuously done, an ongoing project.

MARY: MOTHER AND QUEEN OF PEACE

62. Mary responded to the call to be an agent of peace, a call which God extended to all humans by nature. She deserves the title Mother and Queen of peace of which she is universally venerated. Through this title we invoke Mary's intercession to the Prince of Peace who is her son. Mary is called the Mother of peace because she gave birth to Jesus Christ who is the Prince of Peace and peace incarnate., St. Paul calls Jesus Christ "Our Peace" (Eph. 2:14). But, it was Mary who carried this “our peace” in her womb, gave birth to “peace” and nurtured him to maturity. For this reason she is rightly called the mother of peace.

63. Mary is also called the Mother of peace because she played a role in the reconciliation of humanity with God in a way nobody else has done. With her unreserved yes and total resignation to the will of God, she aided the entry of the Prince of peace into the world and worked with him as he restored man to peace with God. Mary is also venerated as the Mother of peace because throughout her life, she lived according to the will of God. Peace in the Catholic tradition means to live according to the will of God. In addition, she is truly the mother of peace because she is always close to those in need. She is always ready to come to the aid of those who suffer. When she was made aware of her choice to become the mother of the redeemer, who is God's incarnate son, her first thought was to visit her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth who was with child and render her some help. That meeting, in the words of St. John Paul II, gave Mary the chance to express, in the marvelous canticle of the magnificat (Lk. 1:46), her gratitude to God who, with her and through her, had begun a new creation, a new history. (cf. John Paul II, Women: Teachers of Peace, Message... Jan 1, 1995).

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION:

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

64. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ tells us that “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of God” (matt. 5:9). From the scriptures we know that God is by his nature, God of peace and Christ by his nature and mission is the prince of peace. Consequently, peacemakers are blessed because by their lifestyle they show themselves to be true children of God. Peacemakers are blessed because they are participants in fostering the Christian revolution which Christ has initiated by his salvific mission. Peacemakers are blessed because they share in the mystical body of the Prince of peace who is figuratively the vine while we are all branches. Peacemakers are blessed because their non-violence shows that they have absolute trust in God's power to foster peace. Peacemakers are blessed because in loving even their enemies they participate in increasing significantly the store of love and charity in the world. Peacemakers are blessed because their actions foster the type of peace which Christ bequeaths to us and which the world cannot give. Peacemakers are blessed because they pay heed to the Church's admonition of non-violence. Peacemakers are blessed because their actions and engagements foster the socio-economic well-being of their societies. Above all, Peacemakers are blessed because as children of God they are citizens of heaven and heirs of the eternal promise of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER ELEVEN PRAYER

65. Father of heaven and earth! Hear our prayers. And show us the way to peace in the world. Through Our Lord Jesus Christ, your son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

(From the collect of the second Sunday in Ordinary Times).

*Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, on 1st March, Ash
Wednesday, in the year of Our Lord 2017*

*MOST REV VALERIAN M. OKEKE
Archbishop of Onitsha*