

## PAPAL WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE 2011.

At the beginning of the New Year I offer good wishes to each and all for serenity and prosperity, but especially for peace. Sadly, the year now ending has again been marked by persecution, discrimination, terrible acts of violence and religious intolerance. I am certain that His Holiness remembers **Aba**, a kidnapped city! All of us are troubled by what is happening to our large cities. We are frightened by the crime and violence, we are offended by the corruption and inequality that is making city life nearly unlovable. There are many reasons for our urban troubles, but basically they come down to one problem. We have lost the capacity to be neighbours to one another (cf. Luke 10:25-37). For this reason, I implore all men and women of good will to renew their commitment to building a world where all are free to profess their religion or faith, and to express their love of God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind (cf. Mt 22:37). This is the sentiment which inspires and directs this Papal Message for the XLIV World Day of Peace, devoted to the theme: *Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace*.

Religion is like water. It can refresh the earth, making it beautiful and bountiful. Or it can flood the earth, leaving in its wake ruin and devastation. The right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person, whose transcendent nature must not be ignored or overlooked. God created man and woman in his own image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27). For this reason each person is endowed with the sacred right to a full life, also from a spiritual standpoint. Without the acknowledgement of his spiritual being, without openness to the transcendent, the human person withdraws within himself, fails to find answers to the heart's deepest questions about life's meaning, fails to appropriate lasting ethical values and principles, and fails even to experience authentic freedom and to build a just society.

No freedom without sacrifice. Freedom and respect are inseparable; indeed, *in exercising their rights, individuals and social groups are bound by the moral law to have regard for the rights of others, their own duties to others and the common good of all*.

The family, the first cell of human society, remains the primary training ground for harmonious relations at every level of coexistence, human, national and international. When religious freedom is acknowledged, the dignity of the human person is respected at its root, and the ethos and institutions of peoples are strengthened.

Religious freedom, like every freedom, proceeds from the personal sphere and is achieved in relationship with others. Freedom without relationship is not full freedom. Relationship is a decisive component in religious freedom. No man is an Island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main (John Donne). *One person alone is not person at all*. Religion is a positive driving force for the building of civil and political society.

Christians, for their part, are spurred by their faith in God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to live as brothers and sisters who encounter one another in the Church and work together in building a world where individuals and peoples *shall not hurt or destroy ... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea* (Is. 11:9).

The year 2011 marks the twenty-fifty anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace convened in Assisi in 1986 by Pope John Paul II. On that occasion the leaders of the great world religions testified to the fact that religion is a factor of union and peace, and not of division and conflict. The memory of that experience gives reason to hope for a future in which all believers will see themselves, and will actually be, agents of justice and peace. The world needs God. It needs universal, shared ethical and spiritual values, and religion can offer a precious contribution to their pursuit, for the building of a just and peaceful social order at the national and international levels.

May all men and women, and societies at every level and in every part of the earth, soon be able to experience religious freedom, the path to peace!