January 1, 2011

Feast of Mary, Mother of God

World Day of Prayer for Peace

REFLECTION **by Rev. Lloyd Cummings**

What should we be thinking about as we enter the New Year? Are we looking for guidance in living our lives? Are there things we should be concerned about?

On the first day of the New Year, we celebrate the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, and we join in the Church's worldwide observance of Prayer for Peace. What better way can we begin the New Year than to look to Mary our Mother who has brought us Jesus, our Saviour, and who will guide us and care for us so that we may find the fulfillment of our lives in Jesus.

To have peace in the world is at the centre of Mary's heart. Only with peace and goodwill can true human development take place and poverty and hunger, homelessness and lack of health care be overcome.

Every January 1st., our Holy Father gives us a Message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace. The subject of his message this year is: Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace.

In his celebration Of Christmas, Pope Benedict hosted a lunch for the poor in the Vatican audience hall on December 26th. On the eve of Epiphany, he will visit sick children in Rome's Gemelli Hospital.

Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace.

What are the points made by the Pope makes in his Message for Peace?

The Holy Father begins by saying his thoughts turn in a special way to the beloved country of Iraq and the recent sufferings of the Christian community there. He thinks in particular of the attack on the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baghdad, where on October 31 two priests and over fifty faithful were killed at Mass Other attacks ensued, even on private homes. (Recent news tells us that more Catholics and Christians around the world were killed for their faith, martyred, in 2009, than from any other religion, - over 100,000.) The Pope asks all Catholics for their prayers and support for their brethren in the faith who are the victims of violence and intolerance.

"Religious freedom expresses what is unique about the human person, for it allows us to direct our personal and social life to God, in whose light we understand our identity, meaning and purpose.

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. This the sentiment which inspires and directs this Message."

A Sacred Right to Life and to a Spiritual Life

"The right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person. God created man and woman in his own image and likeness. For this reason each person is endowed with the sacred right to a full life, including a spiritual life. The transcendent dignity of the human person can be recognized by all. This dignity must be acknowledged as a universal good. Respect for essential elements of human dignity , such as the right to life and the right to religious freedom, is a condition for the moral legitimacy of every law."

Religious Freedom and Mutual Respect

"Religious freedom is at the origin of moral freedom. It confers full dignity on each individual and is the guarantee of full mutual respect between persons. It is inconceivable that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves – their faith – in order to be active citizens."

The Family, the School of Freedom and Peace

"If religious freedom is the path to peace, religious education is the highway which leads new generations to see others as their brothers and sisters. so that all will feel that they are living members of the one human family. Children should always be able to see in their father and mother the first witnesses of a life directed to the pursuit of truth and the love of God."

A Common Patrimony

"Among the fundamental rights and freedoms, religious freedom enjoys a special status.

Religious freedom is also an achievement of a sound political and juridical culture. Religious freedom is not the exclusive patrimony of believers, but of the whole family of the earth's peoples. It cannot be denied without at the same time encroaching on all fundamental rights and freedoms. It is the litmus test for the respect of all other human rights."

The Public Dimension of Religion

"Religious freedom is not limited to the individual dimension alone, but is attained within one's community and in society. The contribution of religious communities to society is undeniable.

Numerous charitable and cultural institutions testify to this. More important still is religion's ethical contribution in the political sphere. The religious dimension of culture is in no way discriminatory towards those who do not share its beliefs, but instead reinforces social cohesion, integration and solidarity."

Religious Freedom, a Force for Freedom and Civilization

"How can anyone deny the contribution of the world's great religions to the development of civilization? The sincere search for God has led to a greater respect for human dignity.

Christian communities have contributed much to making individuals and peoples aware of their identity and dignity, the establishment of democratic institutions and the recognition of human rights and their corresponding duties.

Today in an increasingly globalized society, Christians are called, not only through their responsible involvement in civic, economic and political life but also through their charity and faith, to offer a valuable contribution to the laborious and stimulating pursuit of justice, integral human development and the right ordering of human affairs. In so doing, they are working for the full recognition of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights." (NO. 8 *omitted*: An Issue of Justice and Civility …)

Dialogue Between Civil and Religious Institutions

"With due respect for the positive secularity of state institutions, the public dimension of religion must always be acknowledged. A healthy dialogue between civil and religious institutions is fundamental for the integral development of the human person and social harmony."

Living in Love and in Truth

"In a globalized world with increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, the great religions can serve as an important factor of unity and peace for the human family. The public space which the international community makes available for the religions helps to create a

measure of agreement about truth and goodness, and a moral consensus. Christians are spurred by their faith in God to live as brothers and sisters who work

together in building a world where individuals and peoples shall not hurt or destroy."

Dialogue as a Shared Pursuit

"Dialogue between the followers of the different religions represents an important means of cooperating with all religious communities for the common good. "Every truth, whoever utters it, comes from the Holy Spirit" (Thomas Aquinas)

Moral Truth in Politics and Diplomacy

"Politics and diplomacy should look to the moral and spiritual patrimony offered by the great religions of the world in order to acknowledge and affirm universal truths, principles and values which cannot be denied without denying the dignity of the human person. Respect for the dignity and worth of the human person was enshrined by the world's peoples in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, which presents universal values and moral principles for the norms, institutions and systems governing coexistence on the national and international levels."

Beyond Hatred and Prejudice

"Today's world witnesses persecution, discrimination, acts of violence and intolerance based on religion. In a particular way, in Asia and Africa, the chief victims are members of religious minorities. There also exist more sophisticated forms of hostility to religion which in western countries, occasionally find expression in a denial of history and the rejection of religious symbols which reflect the identity and culture of the majority of citizens. Often these forms of hostility foster hatred and prejudice; they are inconsistent with a serene and balanced vision of pluralism and the secularity of institutions."

Religious Freedom in the World

"Christian communities are suffering from persecution , discrimination, violence and intolerance

particularly in Asia, Africa, in the Middle east and especially in the Holy Land, a place chosen and blessed by God. I ask all those in authority to act promptly to end every injustice against the Christians living in these lands.

Let us renew "the pledge we give to be forgiving and to pardon when we invoke God's forgiveness

in the Our Father. We ourselves lay down the condition and the extent of the mercy we ask for when we say: 'and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.'

Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace

"Peace is a gift of God, and at the same time a task which is never fully accomplished. I invite all those who wish to be peacemakers, especially the young, to heed the voice speaking within their hearts and thus find in God the stable point of reference for attaining authentic freedom, the inexhaustible force which can give the world a new direction and spirit and overcome the mistakes of the past.

Peace brings to full fruition the deepest qualities and potentials of the human person, which can change the world and make it better."

Our Mass

(THE HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE FOR THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE DOES NOT READILY LEND ITSELF TO A HOMILY. HOWEVER, SINCE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR HIS MESSAGE TO BE HEARD, AND FOR HOMILY PURPOSES, YOU SHOULD SELECT SECTIONS THAT YOU WISH TO COVER AND THEN JUST 'NAME' THE OTHER SECTIONS. LC)

We are gathered together in an assembly of peace, joined together in Christ who reconciles and unites all of us in himself.

Christ by his Death and Resurrection has brought the power of his peace into the world. He becomes present in the Mass to share his power with us.

Our Sign of Peace expresses that we are at peace with one another, one in Christ, all bound together. This makes us open to Christ when we receive him in Communion.

May Christ shape our hearts so that we live in him and extend his peace and forgiveness. Amen.