



“The Joy of the Gospel” – Chapter 4

Formation Theme (2014-2015): An Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis
(May 2015)

Opening Prayer

Take a moment to call to mind the needs that each person has as well as the needs of our community and the need for peace [pause]

Fr. Parent says “Peace is a gift of God, a mature fruit produced by love.” Moreover we read in Sacred Scripture “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.”

Let us pray: Gracious God you have given us our neighbors to love as our very selves and to love You above all else. Aid us in seeing our neighbor in every human being especially those with whom we disagree most and those with whom we would rather not walk. Stir up within us the grace to truly be called Children of God as we seek to build peace in every area of our lives. Cause us to become more and more aware that we belong to and depend upon You for everything. May this awareness that everything we have is a gift from You allow us to be transformed into a gift for others. Help us in this way to become sowers of goodness and peace and make us more readily realize that “Peace is truly the summit of the spiritual journey”. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

III. The common good and peace in society

Pope Francis states that, “Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.” (218) He goes on to speak of peace as not being simply the absence of war but rather that peace must be sought every day and at all times and that as such it depends upon “integral development” or it “will be doomed” and humanity will continue to spawn new forms of violence. He speaks in this of the need to embrace our roles as responsible citizens reminding us that this is a virtue and a moral obligation and it is only thus that peace will be fostered and sown.

Fr. Parent reminds us that “Sowers of Peace lean on the rock of their being which God has chosen as a temple of His Spirit. Peace is the life of God flowing into us which is experienced as a benediction; this benediction engenders in us the faculty of being aware of God in all circumstances, and in the presence of any person or event... Peace is the most tangible manifestation of the active presence of God, of submission to a Supreme Being, of the heart’s being possessed by the One whom we consider a marvelous, attentive and gracious Father.”



Questions:

- 1) How have I evaluated my own lifestyle in light of the concerns Pope Francis raises? Are there areas in which I might see an opportunity for greater integral development?
 - 2) Fr. Parent intimates that in many ways peace in broader contexts will be impossible if we are not individuals who not only seek peace but are peaceful within. Are there areas in my life particularly within my relationships with others where peace is absent, whether in thought, word or deed? How might I better seek to transform these areas and by extension various relationships?
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Pope Francis goes on to offer four pillars of the Church's social doctrine as the "primary and fundamental parameters of reference for interpreting and evaluating social phenomena".

1) Time is greater than space

"A constant tension exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. Broadly speaking, "time" has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of enclosure. People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself. Here we see a first principle for progress in building a people: time is greater than space." (222)

2) Unity prevails over conflict

The encyclical continues, "Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. "Blessed are the peacemakers!" (Mt 5:9)." (226-227)

3) Realities are more important than ideas

"There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric. So a third principle comes into play: realities are greater than ideas. This calls for rejecting the various means of masking reality: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom." (231)



4) The whole is greater than the part

“The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts. There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all. But this has to be done without evasion or uprooting. We need to sink our roots deeper into the fertile soil and history of our native place, which is a gift of God. We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective. Nor do people who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community need to lose their individualism or hide their identity; instead, they receive new impulses to personal growth. The global need not stifle, nor the particular prove barren.” (235)

Fr. Parent’s writings complement this Encyclical, “Sowers of Peace are more concerned with making changes in themselves by renouncing certain ideas or by accepting the disturbances caused by others, than with controlling and alienating others and forcing them to live according to their own customs and habits. Sowers of Peace keep watch over the value of their motivations, seeking to imitate Jesus in his way of dealing with his contemporaries. They tend to avoid evil, to do good, to control their tongue, to keep guard over their lips, to construct and spread peace, to sow it in their milieu and in the hearts of others. As good Pope Jean XXIII tells us, the sower of peace has a talent for not complicating simple things, and for simplifying complicated things. They manage to reduce the mountains, built by our deformed imaginations, into the molehills they are. ”

But how are we to understand this peace of Christ and live as sowers of this peace? A definition of peace may help. St. Thomas Aquinas in describing peace in the Summa writes that, peace is the "work of justice" indirectly, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to peace: but it is the work of charity directly, since charity, according to its very nature, causes peace. For love is "a unitive force" as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv): and peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations.

Since then charity causes peace precisely because it is love of God and of our neighbor, as shown above (Article [3]), there is no other virtue except charity whose proper act is peace... (Question [28], Article [4])... We are commanded to keep peace because it is an act of charity; and for this reason too it is a meritorious act. Hence it is placed among the beatitudes, which are acts of perfect virtue, as stated above (FS, Question [69], Articles [1],3). It is also numbered among the fruits, in so far as it is a final good, having spiritual sweetness.

What is more we read in the documents of Vatican II another complementary and perhaps more applied elaboration of this definition of the peace of Christ as it relates to the modern context. “This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide. That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbor symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father. For by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince of peace reconciled all men with God. By thus restoring all men to the unity of one people and



one body, He slew hatred in His own flesh; and, after being lifted on high by His resurrection, He poured forth the spirit of love into the hearts of men. For this reason, all Christians are urgently summoned to do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about. Motivated by this same spirit, we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself. Insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ. But insofar as men vanquish sin by a union of love, they will vanquish violence as well and make these words come true: "They shall turn their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into sickles. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). Gaudium et Spes Chp 5, 78

Questions:

- 1) Pope Francis writes "Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces." Where do I find myself giving more priority to space than time? What impact is this having? How might I become more concerned about and initiate processes of time (present moment) rather than process space?
- 2) In what ways have I seen and acknowledged others in their deepest dignity? How might I do this for those whom I find most offensive? Discuss ways that doing so might lead to greater solidarity for humanity and more profound joy?
- 3) The Pope calls for a rejection of the following: "angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom". Which of these do I struggle most with and how has it robbed me and others of peace? How might I employ aspects of the Joy of the Gospel and Fr. Parent's writings to overcome this?
- 4) In what ways am I being called to live out my unique individuality in the context of community and what is the larger context calling into question in relation to my personal identity?
- 5) Aquinas and Vatican II both remind us that peace is directly concerned with Charity and only indirectly with justice. How have I understood that peace is primarily and directly achieved through Charity and only indirectly through justice? If I have placed more attention on justice how might this be impacting the direct path of Charity? How might I live more fully into the direct path of Charity?

In section IV of this encyclical we read of "Social dialogue as a contribution to peace" wherein the Pope reminds us of the important and constant need for dialogue, in particular as this relates to evangelization and constructive interactions with other people of good will. He writes, "Evangelization



also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church. In each case, “the Church speaks from the light which faith offers”, contributing her two thousand year experience and keeping ever in mind the life and sufferings of human beings. This light transcends human reason, yet it can also prove meaningful and enriching to those who are not believers and it stimulates reason to broaden its perspectives.” (238)

But there are many avenues by which the Christian is to take up this dialogue. In fact it would seem incumbent upon all Christians, to the extent that they are able and capable to take up the dialogue even if it is an area where they are not specialists. But this then means that I cannot, as a sincere follower of Jesus, simply let it up to the experts to engage in this conversation. It is not enough for me to sit by and say “this is not an area where I can speak.” Instead by my own reading, reflecting, prayer, discernment and trusting I can approach conversation with sincere others, even those who do not believe in Jesus or God and especially those who do not agree with me. I can engage them in this dialogue. At the same time it cannot be based upon mere emotivism but must bring to bear a faith informed by reason and logic. In this context then I can enter the conversation between faith, reason and science as well as in the areas of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue and finally with those who do not believe. Pope Francis sets the framework for these conversations and thus highlights what we must ‘bring to the table’ in each of these areas which are summarized in brief below.

“Dialogue between science and faith also belongs to the work of evangelization at the service of peace. Whereas positivism and scientism “refuse to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences”, the Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence. Faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since “the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God” and cannot contradict each other. Evangelization is attentive to scientific advances and wishes to shed on them the light of faith and the natural law so that they will remain respectful of the centrality and supreme value of the human person at every stage of life. All of society can be enriched thanks to this dialogue, which opens up new horizons for thought and expands the possibilities of reason. This too is a path of harmony and peace.” (242)

“Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that “they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize “the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her children who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her”. [192] We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art.



Jesus told us: “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt 5:9). In taking up this task, also among ourselves, we fulfil the ancient prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares” (Is 2:4).” (244)

“We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity (cf. Rom 11:16-18). As Christians, we cannot consider Judaism as a foreign religion; nor do we include the Jews among those called to turn from idols and to serve the true God (cf. 1 Thes 1:9). With them, we believe in the one God who acts in history, and with them we accept his revealed word.” (247)

“An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of India have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”. In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing with a specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.” (250)

“The Synod Fathers spoke of the importance of respect for religious freedom, viewed as a fundamental human right.[202] This includes “the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one’s beliefs in public”.[203] A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions. In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace.” (255)

Questions:

- 1) How have I understood myself as an instrument of evangelization in these areas of faith, reason, science, ecumenism, and interfaith discussion? Which area seems most remote from my experience and what might I do to bring it closer in order to understand others better?
- 2) What does it mean in the context of searching for and loving the Truth for me to appreciate religious freedom? How might I more effectively live this?



Prayer to Mary Queen of Peace

Mary, Mother of God and my mother, you have been called Queen of Peace. We ask your Son Jesus to give us the gift of peace. Intercede for our peace; peace in our hearts, peace of mind and of soul, peace in our families and communities, peace with all whom we meet, the peace of Jesus. Jesus, Our Savior, Our Brother, King of Peace, we come to you with Mary, Queen of Peace. We humbly ask of You a new outpouring of the gift of peace. Pour out on us Your Holy Spirit of Peace. Give us peace, good Jesus, peace within ourselves, peace in our families, peace in our everyday life. Give peace to our nation, and to all nations, peace among all peoples, peace in the world. Take our prayer to the Father of all peace. Mary Queen of Peace take this offering, our most dear prayer for peace, that we make to the Father, in the Son and through the same Holy Spirit. Amen