

Peace Begins with Me

If charity begins at home, then peace begins with me. In other words, we are responsible for the choice of looking at the world through the eyes of peace. All that is well and good until ... someone desires the same object of affection we desire, until someone ruins our fondest project, violates our 'rights', steals our possessions, undermines our reputation, gets the promotion we think we deserved, betrays our trust, threatens our livelihood – yes, seeks our life. How do we react then? Where do we go with our resentment and powerful drive to get even? Where do we find the strength of love to forgive those who boss us around, who hurt us, even persecute and abuse us?

It is certainly true that the peaceful interaction between individuals may snowball into a powerful and effective social force on a large scale, and that lasting peace must begin in the hearts and minds of us all. However, is it not also true that as long as resentment and rivalry remain unconquered in our own hearts, these will be vented somewhere setting in motion once again the vicious spiral of hatred and violence?

Those who have honestly faced the darkness of their own hearts will not be deceived by the delusionary bumper sticker slogan "Peace is a teddy bear". Rather, their 'inner man' has been regenerated by the Spirit of Peace and has been trained in the rigors of a spiritual battle against mythical forces that lurk deep within the human psyche.

They know that the transformation of the world does not depend, in the final analysis, on human initiative such as a utilitarian shift of consciousness or a social contract, but on God's redeeming love. They know from personal experience that the peace we all long for is more than "wishful thinking". They are very aware that this peace is the fruit of the same unflinching personal engagement with the powers of death that Jesus underwent in his Passion, as the Scripture make clear:

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21-22).

Those who have "undergone" God's dealings with their hearts have spoken of this experience as a form of inner crucifixion followed an inner resurrection. They have come to know that lasting peace is built on both experiences and that these will occur more than once in their life time; indeed, ever time they are tempted to lash out at others in resentment or revenge.

Since their identity now rests in the "totally Other" who approaches them in peace, they no longer need to strive by playing the scapegoating game, laying blame, envying others, desiring what they possess, violently if need be. Rather, they have stepped into the elevator and moved to another level where they are empowered to resist violence non-violently. They also have accepted the responsibility for moving from resentment to love, for changing the world by loving and forgiving even their enemies. In childlike conclusion, they believe that such peaceful imitation of Christ is the most potent method on earth against the powers of empire, domination, enslavement and war. Love is indeed capable of transforming the world.