

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

On Earth Peace to all of Good Will

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus punctures the human scene in such a manner that all is forever changed. Hope is born. Because of its origin, such hope can never ultimately disappoint. Love is institutionalized and will prevail in human history as measured time and kairos (God's time) merge.

Nonetheless, there are always prophets of gloom and doom. The persistence of pessimism and the constant harping of those who insist that sinful humanity will prevail, proclaim the sustainability of peace as neigh unto impossible.

I would contend, however, that visionary leadership and definitive, though admittedly fragile, steps have been taken that provide evidence that the proclamation of the Angel on that first Christmas is operative for those willing to courageously trust the news of the heavenly hosts. Among these hopeful signs are:

- 1) The 50th Anniversary of Blessed Pope John XXIII's landmark encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*.

Similar to the angels' audience, this document was addressed to all men of good will. It was written in perilous times when the nuclear stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union cast grave shadows on the inevitability of catastrophic war. At its root, the message called for respect of fundamental human rights and the necessity of nations to respect the sovereignty of every nation within the framework of cooperation, namely, the United Nations. 50 years later, the encyclical continues to be prophetic providing the light forward in global relationships.

- 2) Contemporary initiatives designed to achieve peace in perilous and crisis prone situations. Examples stand out:
 - The resumption of peace talks between **the Israelis and Palestinians**. While there is plenty of blame on both sides, the mere fact the two sides are talking is an achievement. As long as dialogue continues, there is always the opportunity for a breakthrough and an outcome that favors the ordinary citizens of both states who basically want to lead a peaceful, familial life. The operative reality, in spite of the negativity and posturing is that **PEACE IS POSSIBLE**. May this possibility bloom into reality through our prayer and support of this courageous initiative dedicated to peace.
 - The resolution of the **Syrian crisis** by the Syrian government's willingness to surrender its chemical weapons and those of mass destruction. Such was accomplished not by bombs or punishment but by negotiation and the direct

intervention of a coalition of governments and the United Nations. Further peace negotiations between the government of Syrian President Assad and prominent rebel groups are planned. These negotiations known as the Geneva II Middle East Peace Conference are scheduled to take place on January 22, 2014. Where there is dialogue there is hope.

- Another positive development is the addressing of the Iranian threat to develop and utilize nuclear weapons. This ominous possibility has loomed over the Middle East and inhibited efforts to achieve peace in the region. The current breakthrough which is the beginning of bringing resolution to a huge problem is highly significant and again legitimately hopeful.

In the center of these recent positive developments is the entrance on the world stage of Pope Francis. Without doubt, he is a man of peace. He ardently believes peace is possible. His plan is simple: Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. His voice is being heard and respected throughout the world. The Pope's voice can be powerfully amplified by our support and the raising of our voices with a similar message.

We Americans, in retrospect, after the debacles of Iraq and Afghanistan – where thousands of lives were lost or irreparably harmed and an endless list of other collateral harmful outcomes and a billion dollars uselessly spent – can readily appreciate the Pope's message and hopefully garner the courage to put it into action in our own spheres of influence.

The angel's message on that Christmas day – “On Earth Peace to all of Good Will” will again reverberate this year in our churches, be heard on the airwaves and in widespread community concerts. The annual celebration is consoling and engenders yearly nostalgia. The vital question for us, though, is do we really believe it? If we do, then there is authentic reason for hope!

May all in our diocesan community of Des Moines enjoy a Merry and Blessed Christmas and abundant graces of a Provident God in 2014.