

Making a Difference

Reflections on Pope Francis' 2019 World Day of Peace message

By Tony Magliano

As the saying goes, “Politics and religion don’t mix.” Although this cliché is espoused by many, you will not hear it from Pope Francis.

On the contrary, the leader of the Catholic Church firmly teaches that our Gospel-based faith has a wealth of wisdom to offer the often corrupt world of politics. And that it is our duty to strive to infuse that wisdom into the body politic.

As exhibit “A,” consider the Holy Father’s Jan. 1 World Day of Peace message – appropriately titled “Good politics is at the service of peace.”

Peace “is like a delicate flower struggling to blossom on the stony ground of violence,” the pope writes. “Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction.”

This is so true. As one of many sad examples, consider how often political officials allow and even authorize the oppression of minority groups like the Rohingya in Myanmar, and now in Bangladesh (see: <https://bbc.in/2KPgZ7Q>, <https://bit.ly/2RPcE4a>).

And consider that many political leaders in governments throughout the world, including democracies, largely ignore the marginalized poor – in effect exiling them to the fringes of society, and even leaving millions of them to die every year (see: <https://borgenproject.org/15-world-hunger-statistics/>).

Among the “political vices” the pope cites are “xenophobia, racism, lack of concern for the natural environment, the plundering of natural resources for the sake of quick profit and contempt for those forced into exile.” All of which bring to mind recent dire environmental warnings from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (see: <https://on.natgeo.com/2C4uv2j>), the National Climate Assessment (see: <https://bit.ly/2DFvfO>), and the often cold-hearted political response to suffering migrants (see: <https://bbc.in/2yZnCMD>).

Here the pontiff’s words are equally strong, “Political addresses that tend to blame every evil on migrants and to deprive the poor of hope are unacceptable. Rather, there is a need to reaffirm that peace is based on respect for each person, whatever his or her background.”

Pope Francis then challenges the immoral tragedy of war and fear. He says, “Peace can never be reduced solely to a balance between power and fear.” And adds

that the proliferation of arms is “contrary to morality and the search for true peace” (see: <https://bit.ly/2BqRelc>).

And he condemns “forms of nationalism that call into question the fraternity of which our globalized world has such great need.”

In the world – political and otherwise – where self-centered egos often dominate, Pope Francis calls our attention to the humble corrective teaching of Jesus: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

Francis then challengingly calls us to be creative peacemakers: “Today more than ever, our societies need ‘artisans of peace’ who can be messengers and authentic witnesses of God the Father, who wills the good and happiness of the human family.”

And to that Pope Francis encouragingly adds, “Everyone can contribute his or her stone to help build the common home.” With open hearts and minds to God, let each of us ask ourself: What is my stone? And how can I best use it to build our common home?

And then consider a New Year’s resolution worth keeping: Read “Good politics is at the service of peace” and prayerfully strive to put it into practice (see: <https://bit.ly/2CmIobS>).

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