

**Homily for January 1, 2002
Mass for Peace and Justice**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Isaiah 32:15-20
Philippians 4:6-9
Matthew 5:38-48**

We want peace – and so we shall work for justice.

This year our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II has requested that January 1st be a special day of prayer for peace. Our own bishops have recently issued a pastoral message discussing the September 11th terrorist's attacks on America and calling for this January 1st to be that day of prayer for peace in every parish throughout this land.

They ask that our nation join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive. Years ago Pope Paul VI declared, "If you want peace, work for justice." This wisdom should not be misunderstood. No injustice legitimizes the horror we have experienced. But a more just world will be a more peaceful world. There will still be people of hate and violence, but they will have fewer allies, fewer supporters and resources to commit their heinous acts. Each situation must be addressed on its own merits. Stopping terrorism must be a priority, but foreign policy cannot be wholly subsumed under this campaign. The Israeli - Palestinian conflict, the suffering of people in Iraq, the lack of participation in

political life, the abuse of human rights, in debit corruption, grinding poverty amid plenty and threats to local cultures are sources of deep resentment and hopelessness which terrorists seek to exploit for their own ends. Our country's creative and constructive engagement, particularly with the Arab and Muslim worlds, in resolving these problems, will restore a peace based on justice.

In a world where one fifth of the population survives on less than a dollar a day, where some twenty countries are involved in major armed conflict and where poverty, corruption, and repressive regimes bring untold suffering to millions people, we simply cannot remain indifferent. Since unjust means cannot ultimately result in justice, our bishops urge us to work for the common good, measured not just an economic, political, or security terms, but also in terms of culture, basic human rights such as religious freedom and all that is needed for virtuous and spiritual life consistent with authentic human dignity. A few weeks ago the American embassy in Kabul, the capitol of Afghanistan, was reopened. In the ceremony marking that event, the acting ambassador to Afghanistan for the United States made what I thought to be a humbling and yet realistic observation. He said in effect, "We in the United States and other first world nations were wrong years ago in

turning our backs on the Afghani people who are in their time of need. We must not let this happen again.” It takes courage and humility to speak the truth - I think we’ve come a long way in doing that for such a statement to be made by someone in an official capacity after these days of trial and terror.

In their document, the American bishops list a number of areas in which our efforts must be concentrated: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation in Iraq involving the massive suffering of the Iraqi people, terrorism in the Sudan, the scandal of poverty - the intolerable extremes of misery and the growing gulf between the haves and the have-nots, the need to strengthen human rights even among our allies who do not regard them highly, the need to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and pursue progressive nuclear disarmament, and finally, to strengthen the United Nations and other international institutions

These are the ways, our bishops say, which harbor works of justice which will promote peace. This, the bishops say, is a time for prayer, a time for fasting, a time for teaching the Church’s position on war and peace, a time for dialog with Muslims and Jews and Christians of other faiths, a time for witness to our values of mutual respect and human dignity and respect for life, a time for service through all the various charities at our beckon call, for a time for solidarity with those who suffer here and overseas, and a time for hope that together we can defend the common good and build a more just and peaceful world.

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