A Call to Mercy and Peace:
Pope Francis’s 2016
World Day of Peace Message

Pope Francis has issued a call to reject indifference and to grow in solidarity, mercy, and peace in the New Year. These reflection questions help us to think about his challenge and consider the signs of hope he offers.

Reflection Questions

1. Pope Francis begins his 2016 Message of Peace by calling our attention to several signs of solidarity and hope: the recent summit and international environmental agreement to combat climate change and a new agenda on sustainable development, as well as the Year of Mercy and the anniversary of two seminal Church documents. Why do such signs of hope receive less attention in popular media than negative stories? Where can you find out more about these signs of hope and how can you share hopeful signs with others in your community? Hope is a virtue that must be practiced to grow stronger. How can you model Pope Francis in practicing hope?

PRAYER

O Prince of Peace, Creator of all, we are grateful for the signs of hope you offer us at a dark time in this world. Help us to reflect deeply on the words of our Holy Father and respond to his call for mercy and peace. Give us the grace to reject comfortable indifference and to embrace invigorating solidarity. Guide us to become peacemakers and to see every day as an opportunity to practice compassion, hope, and peace. Give us the strength to work for peace, to lift our voices for peace, and to become ourselves signs of hope and lights in the darkness as we follow the model of Pope Francis. May we share in the joy of faith and may this sustain us in the New Year ahead. Amen.
2. Pope Francis reminds us we “would be less human” if we forget “we are related to all our brothers and sister, for whom we are responsible and with whom we act in solidarity.” Where do you see situations that diminish individuals’ humanity because they forget this bond? Where do you see humans flourishing because of their commitment to a network of relationships?

3. Our Pope reminds us of the dangers of denying the Sacred and believing we owe nothing to anyone but ourselves. He also speaks about the indifference of people who see some of the problems of the world but feel no compassion or compunction to help. How are these two situations related? Why are so many today choosing personal comfort over engagement with those at the margins? Why does the Pope see this as more than an individual problem; how has it become a social problem?

4. How does “indifference lead to self-absorption and a lack of commitment” and then to an absence of “peace with God, with our neighbor, and with the environment?” Why does the Pope link peace with God together with peace with our neighbor and with the environment? Francis later declares that indifference “seeks excuses: observing ritual prescriptions, looking to all things needing to be done, hiding behind hostilities and prejudices which keep us apart.” Have you seen such excuses in society, in your own community, and even in your own life?

5. Pope Francis, like the popes in the modern world before him, points beyond individual acts to structures and systems that institutionalize social sin, such as “deplorable economic policies which breed injustice, division and violence” and political projects aimed at maintaining power and wealth. Where do we see evidence of these structures and systems today? Where do we see the possibility and models of “graced structures” that reject indifference?

6. The root of all of modern Catholic Social Teaching is in Scriptures. What aspects of the Old and New Testament does the Pope hold up for our reflection? Why are these central to our faith and what are they calling us to do in the modern world? Why is this call sometimes hard to hear for people of faith?
7. The Pope mentions the family, educators, and communicators as those with special responsibilities to foster solidarity and mercy. What are some ways this responsibility can be carried out? Why is it important for all of these role models to communicate and reinforce the message of solidarity and mercy?

8. At the end of the message, Pope Francis, once again, holds up signs of hope (Section 7). Have you seen examples of these in the world, in our nation, and in your local communities? How can you support such signs of hope?

9. In Section 8, who does the Pope call our attention to, and how does attention to their plight promote peace in the world?

10. The Pope ends his message with a special request for leaders of nations. What are the three requests he presents, and how can we support his call on these issues?

11. What has been most interesting to you in this reflection on the Pope’s Message of Peace? How can reflection and action on this promote your own spiritual and social growth? With whom would you like to share Pope Francis’s message of hope?