

Weapons of Peace: A Call to Personal and Communal Peacemaking

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, Archbishop of Seattle
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Good [morning/afternoon/evening], friends.

As we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our world still yearns for peace. Numerous wars and conflicts still rage across the globe, devastating human lives, families, societies and natural creation. From the streets of our cities to the halls of global power, polarization and conflict seem to echo louder than ever. Clearly, world leaders and diplomats are key agents of change, and we must pray for them daily. But when we ask ourselves what one person can do to advance peace amid such overwhelming global challenges, it can seem overwhelming. In this brief presentation I wish to explore a few ways each person can make a positive contribution to expand the presence of peace within our troubled world.

In his final remarks to the world on Easter Sunday, the day before he died, Pope Francis used a term that caught my attention and imagination. He spoke of building ‘weapons of peace’, and I quote:

I appeal to all those in positions of political responsibility in our world not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads to isolation from others, but rather to use the resources available to help the needy, to fight hunger and to encourage initiatives that promote development. These are the **“weapons” of peace**: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death. (Urbi et Orbi address, April 20, 2025)

Pope Francis reminds us, peace is not merely the absence of war—it is a positive, just, and charitable state, grounded in respect for human dignity and the pursuit of the common good. Peace is an “art” that demands the active participation and commitment of everyone in society, from individuals to institutions. Building peace requires placing the human person, their dignity, and the common good at the center of all social, political, and economic activity.

Further building on this imperative to be concrete in our efforts to build weapons of peace, Pope Leo recently offered another encouragement in an address to a group of Italian bishops:

The relationship with Christ calls on us to develop a pastoral focus on the theme of peace. Indeed, the Lord sends us into the world to bring his same gift: “Peace

be with you!", and to become its creators in everyday life. I am thinking of parishes, neighborhoods, areas within the country, the urban and existential peripheries. There, where human and social relationships become difficult and conflict takes shape, perhaps subtly, a Church capable of reconciliation must make herself visible. (Pope Leo to Italian bishops June 17, 2025)

Today, I invite you to reflect with me on how each of us can become a peacemaker—not just in theory, but in action. Weapons of peace must first be cultivated in each of us, by nurturing a peaceful spirit, growing in virtue and holiness, and then radiating outward in efforts that strengthen the common good of the whole human family.

Part I: Personal Growth in Virtue and Holiness

Peace begins within the human heart. Before we can transform the world, we must allow God to transform our hearts.

1. Cultivate the Beatitudes

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Peacemaking is not passive—it is an active virtue. It requires humility, mercy, and a hunger for justice. These are qualities we must cultivate regularly to create an interior reality of peace.

One practical step to build peace is to exercise mercy in our daily interactions. Choosing gentleness over aggression when we are offended is just part of the conversion necessary for those who wish to make a personal impact for peace. Purity of heart is another place to look "within" for this is what allows us to see others as God sees them.

As we nurture a deeper interior peace, we establish a strong foundation for building communities of peace in our families, relationships, neighborhoods and broader communities.

2. Live the Virtues

Virtue is the foundation of holiness. Consider these:

In a world where the daily pace is more and more frenetic and hectic, patience is needed. How often do we experience moments of frustration? Patience allows one to remain calm in the face of difficulty and refrain from retaliation, choosing more constructive outcomes.

Often today fruitful discourse and dialogue are missing. To solve simple or even significant differences Courage is required to Speak truth with love, even when it's unpopular. The goal here is to listen to truly understand the other. Dialogue that earnestly seeks the common good does not aim to win an argument or belittle or ignore the partner of the conversation but rather to reach a beneficial outcome.

Pope Leo has called for a 'revolution of love' in order to renew society. St. Paul drew attention to the fruits of the spirit which are worthy of the attention and hard work of the human family working towards peace, a few of which are love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control. Are these not the true weapons of peace encouraged by Pope Francis?

3. Prayer and Spiritual Reflection

Prayer is a weapon of peace. It softens the heart and opens us to God's will, and the Good Lord certainly desires that the human family live in harmony with God, with one another and with all of creation. This is what every human heart longs for in our deepest self. Let us learn to feed this longing with what satisfies.

Begin each day with a prayer for peace.

Reflect on Scripture, especially passages like Romans 12:18: "If possible, on your part, live at peace with all." Or one could use many other sources of spiritual inspiration.

Fast and offer sacrifices for those in conflict. Such sacrifices when combined with mercy are powerful agents that transform the individual person and the human family.

Part II: Building the Common Good Together

Virtuous lives must overflow into social action. Catholic Social Teaching calls us to work together addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and injustice. We are to find concrete ways to promote dialogue, reconciliation and solidarity. Peace is impossible without justice. Here are some suggestions:

Promote Justice and Human Dignity Support policies and initiatives that promote fair wages, access to education, and healthcare. Volunteer with organizations that serve the marginalized. Advocate for economic systems that prioritize human dignity over profit.

2. Foster Solidarity and Social Friendship

We are not isolated individuals—we are one human family. Build bridges in your community. Get to know your neighbors, especially those who are different from you.

Engage in dialogue, not debate. Listen to understand, not to win. Create spaces of encounter and welcome in parishes, schools, and homes.

3. Educate for Peace

Peace must be taught and learned. Encourage education in non-violence and conflict resolution. Teach children the value of empathy, compassion and cooperation. Support programs that promote intercultural understanding and reconciliation.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

While Pope Francis' encouragement to world leaders to divert funds from the military industrial complex to build weapons of peace which promote human development, there is included a more implicit call to every member of the human family to build a strong foundation of peace, one person, one relationship at a time.

Let us be Good Samaritans, extending mercy to the wounded, isolated, and forgotten. Let us build communities of peace, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished and mercy extended. Let us cultivate and wield weapons of peace—dialogue, solidarity, justice, and prayer.

Peace is not a distant dream. It is a daily decision that requires practical actions. And it begins with you and me.

I will conclude with the words of St. Paul: "Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another." (Romans 14:17)

Thank you.