Pope Francis Calls for a "Politics of Nonviolence" in Annual World Day of Peace Message

Pope Francis has called for a "politics of nonviolence" in his World Day of Peace Message for 2017. "Violence is not the cure for our broken world," he writes. On the contrary, "To be true followers of Jesus today," he argues, "also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence."

In the message, dated Dec. 8 and released on Dec. 12, ahead of the official commemoration of the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1, the pope called for active nonviolence as a political strategy and for peacebuilding on the part of "political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions and business and media executives." Peacebuilding consists of initiatives to prevent the outbreak or resumption of violent conflict, such as anti-incitement campaigns and interreligious dialogue.

The 2017 message is the first extensive treatment of nonviolence by a pope, though Saint Pope John Paul II devoted three paragraphs to the topic in his encyclical "Centesimus Annus." It comes as a response to a meeting hosted last spring by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace with Catholic peace activists, including members of Pax Christi International.

Pope Francis cites a number of modern Christian witnesses to non-violence, including Saint Theresa of Calcutta, Dr. Martin Luther King, Saint John Paul II and Saint Teresa of Lisieux. He calls attention to the Sermon on the Mount and especially the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-10) from Matthew's Gospel, as Jesus' "manual" for peacemaking. Catholics will hear these scriptures in the Sunday Lectionary during January and February of 2017.

Pope Francis is also careful to note that peacebuilding is not exclusively a Catholic activity "but is typical of many religious traditions for which compassion and nonviolence are essential elements pointing to the way of life." He concludes invoking Our Lady as Queen of Peace, and says, "Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace".