

PAX HOMINIBUS¹

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PEACE to men of good will.² That was the angels' message to men, announcing the will of God, on the first Christmas day.

Among men the birth of the first-born of the family is a time of great rejoicing and marked celebration. It is a time of liberality. The parents feel well disposed towards their friends. They invite their friends to share in their blessing and to partake of their bounty in honor of the new-born infant. At the birth of the Only Begotten of the Father, the Father was well disposed towards men and invited them to share in His richest blessing, Peace. Peace is His richest blessing because it presupposes and includes all others; not the peace which is circumscribed by mortal life, but the peace that fructifies in the short life of man and blossoms in all its eternal splendor in the glory of heaven. This is God's gift to men in honor of the birth of His Only Begotten Son, Peace to men of good will.

The peace of God is the tranquility of union, the fruit of love and the blessing of the just. It is that internal peace which the world cannot give whereby the heart reposes in the tranquility of desire. The world cannot give it for the world has nothing that can so tranquilize the longings of man that he can desire nothing more to add to his happiness. The peace that God gives is the enjoyment of His friendship with the added security that the love that unites man to Himself can never be disturbed unless by the perversity of man himself who must love Him freely. Through union with God man has union with himself, for living and moving in the love of God he orders all his affections and desires so that in all his actions he conforms to that love. He knows that friendship in the love of God is the greatest enjoyment to which he can aspire. Man was made for

¹ To commemorate the canonization of St. Albert the Great, lately declared Saint and Universal Doctor of the Church, a lover of peace and the great peacemaker of his age, the source of this brief work is his writings on the above passage in the Gospel of St. Luke.

² St. Luke ii, 14.

God and he cannot rest without Him. The love that unites man with himself reaches out beyond him and extends to all his fellowmen. It is the foundation of peace among men. It is so inclusive that if it were refused to his fellowmen, he who refused it would destroy his unity with God. As the love of God increases in the hearts of men, to the same extent His peace tranquilizes the lives of men; on this earth, in the hope of a perfect peace; in heaven, in its perfect realization, the undisturbed enjoyment of God. This is the peace that Christ brought to as many as would receive Him. Christ is said to be our peace because "He made peace, loves the peaceful, places his seal upon them; and in testimony to all this he left his peace."³

Christ made peace between man and God. When he came into the world there was nothing but darkness and death. Long ago man had revolted against God and raised up enmities between mankind and its Creator. From that day forward man never knew peace, but he longed for it with a great longing. His soul was dead for the breath of life was taken from it. He was once a thing of beauty, in perfection a little less than the angels, created to take the place of other angels, lord and master of all the earth. In a moment of pride he elected to liken himself unto God, to know all things. For a moment he turned from God to himself and sin and death entered the world. And sin is the death of the soul, the barrier between man and God. From that moment his friendship with God was destroyed. Grace was driven from the soul of man. And grace is the life of the soul. The lord and master of all the earth was driven from his paradise of pleasure and all the men to follow him were stamped with the shame of his revolt. Darkened in intellect and weakened in will they became the slaves of the earth over which they were made to rule. God was forgotten and sin increased and multiplied. He sent forth fire and water to destroy parts of the earth for the sins of men were great. He made laws for men and sent prophets to instruct them, but the laws were broken and the prophets stoned. Slaves of the earth, men sought their pleasures in the earth and in themselves. Men rebelled among themselves and slew one another. Injustice and greed filled the earth and peace was never known. But they always sought for peace, for men always seek to attain the fulfilment of all their desires tranquilly and without hindrance. Hungrily men fed upon the transitory enjoyments of the earth while their souls languished for the fulness of life. The story of the sin of man is the first part of the story of Christ. And Christ is God and man. Christ

³ St. Albert, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, ii, 1.

came to restore the friendship between man and God and to bring back God's blessing on the earth, for "It hath well pleased the Father—through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things that are on earth and the things that are in heaven."⁴ He came into the world as the light and life of men. As the light of men He made known the Father, His wondrous mercy and great love of men and the things that were prepared for those who love Him. Christ in the fullness of his love begged that men be made one with Himself and His Father. As the life of men He brought new life into the souls of men who received Him. First He washed away the sin which destroyed the souls of men. And the first peace Christ gave to man was "tranquillity through remission of sins."⁵ The next was the "tranquillity through reconciliation to God,"⁶ which is not had unless through the grace of God. When sin is washed away grace abounds. When He healed, Christ would say, "Go in peace." Whomsoever He cured, He forgave; whom He forgave, He made His own. That all might know His great love for men He hung upon a tree; that being lifted up He might draw all men to Himself. In the blood of Christ sins are washed away, by grace men are made the sons of God. Thus Christ made peace between man and God. "We glory in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received reconciliation."⁷

Christ made peace between man and the angels "through the restoration of the angelic ruin."⁸ The angels of God drove man from the Garden of Paradise with flaming swords and guarded all around it that he might not enter in again. And war was made between man and the angels. The sin that destroyed the friendship of God likewise alienated the friendship of the angels. Henceforth the angels looked upon men as slaves. Being sent to earth to make known the will of God they allowed men to fall down and adore them. When God took unto Himself the nature of man, uniting in Himself the human and divine, the angels no longer allowed men to adore before them. They respected the nature they saw united to God, "I fell down to adore before the feet of the angel—and he said—see thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the

⁴ Coloss. i, 20.

⁵ St. Albert, *op. cit.* x, 5, 6.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Rom. v, 14.

⁸ St. Albert, *op. cit.* ii, I.

prophets.”⁹ In sign of this union the angels announced “Peace on earth to men of good will.” And peace was made with the angels.

Christ made peace in man. The sin of man “made war between the flesh and the spirit, for the spirit first corrupted the flesh, the flesh being corrupted henceforth corrupts the spirit.”¹⁰ “The flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary one to another; so that you do not the things that you would.”¹¹ When man was in the state of innocence the powers of the flesh were perfectly subjected to the will and reason and the will was in perfect accord with the will of God. But sin destroyed that union and peace in man. Through the mystery of his Incarnation Christ destroyed that discord and brought back peace to man. “He is our peace, Who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh, that he might make the two in himself into one new man, making peace.”¹² In Christ there are two things, divinity and humanity, and the humanity is complete, being both spirit and flesh, that is soul and body. In all things the flesh was one with the spirit and the spirit was one with God, so that it was said of Him, “And his place is in peace.”¹³ This peace Christ gives to man not by destroying the flesh, but by uniting the spirit of man to Himself, so that through the grace of this union the spirit rules over the flesh making it one with itself. This peace is “the rest of the heart in the tranquillity of desire”¹⁴ whereby man first of all desires the eternal friendship of God, hoping in Him as the perfection of his life. The other things of life he orders according to his first great desire. Man reborn in the love of Christ is fortified in His peace, so that he is at peace with himself and God.

Christ made peace among men. The love that unites man with himself and God is the bond of unity among men. Herein is the perfection of the peace of Christ, for all who begin in the love of God must mutually continue in that love and end with God. The peace of his love Christ came to bring to all men for He loved all men with a burning love and all he asked of men was love, that they abide in his love and for his sake love one another, “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you shall abide in my love. . . . This is my commandment that

⁹ Apoc. xxii, 8, 9.

¹⁰ St. Albert, *op. cit.*, ii, 14.

¹¹ Gal. v, 17.

¹² Eph. ii, 14, 15.

¹³ Ps. lxxv, 3.

¹⁴ St. Albert, *op. cit.* x 6.

you love one another, as I have loved you."¹⁵ Patiently and humbly Christ drew men to Himself, by removing the veil of ignorance and letting the bright light of truth shine into the minds of men. He taught them of the God of Truth and Love, pointed out the vanity of seeking happiness in the things of the world, taught them to forgive, to be patient, to be kind, to love one another. His doctrine of truth and love was new to them. It was sublime; too sublime for them. But then the world was in sin. He washed away sin. Then He built up a Kingdom of Truth and Love among men into the peace of which all men were called. This Kingdom was spread over the earth that everywhere men might enter therein. It is bordered by heaven and earth, so that in heaven and on earth He is present among men. His Kingdom He called the Church. The light of Truth shines through the Church dispelling darkness, ignorance and error, ever leading men to the truth of Himself. Through the Sacraments of the Church He enters into the hearts of men and unites Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, sinners and all the down-trodden of the earth as brothers in the peace of His love.

Christ loves the peaceful. He loves them for He loves peace. He came into the world at a time of peace; peace, because the nations of the world were not at war, not because the hearts of men were at peace. Rome dominated the world and there was no power strong enough to resist her. It was the best peace men knew before Christ came into the world. He came to bring true peace. He lived in peace. Even when He was scorned, condemned, mocked and crucified He was at peace and forgave His enemies. There was no hatred or enmity in the heart of Christ. Nor can there be any such feelings in the hearts of His followers. He taught peace, "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace."¹⁶ The peaceful are one with Him and their hearts are open to Him. Their peace is the fruit of love "and he transfers them into the grace of the adoption of the sons of God."¹⁷ Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God".¹⁸

Christ left His peace to men. At his birth the angels announced the advent of His peace and When He was about to leave the world He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I

¹⁵ John, xv, 9, 10, 12.

¹⁶ John xvi, 33.

¹⁷ St. Albert *op. cit.* ii, 1.

¹⁸ Matt. v, 9.

give unto you; not as the world giveth, do I give unto you".¹⁹ The peace He gives is an interior peace as opposed to the exterior peace of the world; rest in the hope of eternal blessedness in place of the longing for things that quickly pass away. Neither riches, nor honors, nor power, nor pleasures nor anything in the world can bring true peace to the heart of man. These things are acquired with great anxiety and trouble. Their possession is a source of worry and distraction. There is always the danger of losing what has been acquired; of being urged on to greater possessions by the greed they engender. Very rarely are they acquired without a conflict with conscience. Neither can the world or its possessions unite men in a fraternal charity, because once they are acquired they set men apart from their fellowmen and breed a contempt for those who are poor. The world and all that is in it were not made that men might seek their happiness in them, but to aid men to attain a greater and nobler happiness, that interior happiness of the soul, which far excels the potentialities of material things. Of the peace of the world it was said, "Whereas they lived in a great war of ignorance, they call so many and so great evils peace." The peace of Christ is divine sweetness in freedom from sin, life with God, friendship with fellowmen and serenity of heart and mind. It is confidence in God and composure amid the trials and tribulations that the world must bring. It is that which makes life enjoyable. It is that peace of which it was said, "And (let) the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds."²⁰ It is the peace whose perfection is had from the supreme enjoyment of the Beatific Vision in the glories of heaven.

To-day the nations of the world are looking for peace. They shall never find it until they find Christ. There is no peace outside His Kingdom of Truth and Love. Christ is He of Whom it was said, "For a Child is born to us. . . and His name shall be called the Prince of Peace. His empire shall be multiplied and there shall be no end of peace." This is His message on Christmas day, "Come to Me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you"²¹ in the peace of My love.

¹⁹ John xiv—27.

²⁰ Philip. iv, 7.

²¹ Matt. xi, 28.