

BLACKFRIARS

MEDITATION ON PEACE

IN these days greatly troubled by War, we may well speak of Peace. The word itself almost brings refreshment to our minds when the sky above us has been troubled by the sounds of our country's preparation for war. I feel we are in one of the most critical periods of the world. For the moment, I presume that God alone, and those in the secrets of God, can see the end.

The kingdoms of the world must go forth to war if they want to spread; if they wish to be world-wide, they prepare quite consistently for world-war; and it might succeed. The great *Pax Romana* was essentially a peace based on war—the peace that came from the Strong Man Armed.

Peace has so many consoling qualities that it is constantly taken for an end. Peace should never be sought as an end. Disorder always results if we seek as an end what is only an effect.

When Our Blessed Lord sent out His apostles, He was commissioning a thing that was world-wide; not Religion, but *the* Religion; not just for a race, but for mankind as such; world-wide because it is to be One and Holy. Therefore this Kingdom of Christ offers, at once, *Peace*, and never the sword. Sometimes the sword has been used in defence of the Church. I do not know whether it was ever a very effective defence of the Church. In the Garden of Olives, Peter very naturally used the sword. It was quite a natural defence. He was using his rights, I presume. Yet St. Thomas Aquinas lays down quite simply that Peace flies when each one seeks his rights. (I suggested that several years ago as a motto for the League of Nations.) The Church, of course, in its defence might justifiably use the sword. When Peter used it, the only result was to cut off the hearing ear! You couldn't expect the Gospel to be heard by a man whose ear you had cut off. Even when the sword is used quite rightfully in defence of the Church, I presume it is the end of all apologetics. That is a deep thought; very timely, and therefore unheeded.

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One of the tragic things in the history of mankind is that Eastern salutation *Shilom*, "Peace." I do not think it is a salutation from Paradise. I think it gradually forced itself upon a group of people who slew each other at first sight. We are gradually getting back into that now—a state of mutual slaughter. I think that salutation comes from the time when the first thing a man said, when he wanted to have ordinary human communication with his fellows, was "Peace." He would put his hand up and say, "Peace! I am not going to slay you." I think it took years of conflict to arrive at that salutation, "Peace."

I do not know who is to blame; but we now seem to be getting into that same state. It is no use asking who is to blame. We have to try to separate the fighters. Our Lord said that we must go into the world with Peace. The poor world seems to be in a state of suspended diplomatic relations with God.

That wonderful thing St. John the Baptist said of Our Blessed Lord has been burning into my mind: "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him Who taketh away *the sin* of the world." There is that marvellous thing (I regret to say, changed in the Liturgy), *the sin*, as if some great collective sin had been committed which the collective body itself cannot take away. God cannot forgive till we repent. The sin cannot be taken away except by the Lamb, the Victim.

It is quite possible that a great deal of the trouble coming upon us now is the reaping of what we did not sow but we ought to have uprooted. As Cardinal Pole said, at the opening of the Council of Trent, we are responsible for the words we ought to have said and did not; for the things we ought to have done and did not do; for the things we ought to have uprooted and we let grow; for the things we ought to have planted and did not plant.

And perhaps this terrible upheaval we see—and which may spread still further, like the Black Death—may be an occasion for us to look into spiritual things to prevent the epidemic spreading. When there is an epidemic of typhoid, we see to the drains; when there are terrible epidemics, like smallpox, we try to find out what was the *cause*. We may

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move the patient and keep him warm, for the time being, but if we went on with that, just giving first aid, we should make the disease worse. The important matter is: "What was the *cause?*" Sometimes they find a remarkable thing, something seeming to have nothing to do with it. In one street all may be dying, because away up on top of a hill there is a stream of water being polluted.

At the present time, there is a sort of contagious outbreak being carried about the world. It might be caused by some contemplatives on a beautiful mountain, or the Priesthood. And of course, if anything were wrong with those two groups, any mortal thing might happen down below—if, for instance, they were so occupied with Prayer they did not think of Justice towards others. There would be an outbreak necessarily, with the necessity which is all round Free Will.

I venture to suggest that you may have good people in a bad system, and bad people in a good system. And as exceptions usually draw attention to themselves—one black sheep in a flock of white draws all eyes—the bad persons in a good system condemn it. Each one of us has to examine, not whether his work in itself is a good thing, nor whether his message is true, but whether there is anything in himself that is hindering that work.

Nowadays, when the Priest is almost suspect, I wonder if lay people have not a work of primary importance. First of all there is the life they lead—not that a good life should be lived for the sake of being a good sermon, but because a bad life is a bad sermon and takes the edge off everything else.

But suppose the system is a bad system. There is collective sin; and that has to be atoned for. I presume they are beginning to atone for it in Spain. We had a fairly large dose in England and Ireland. I suppose it is not finished yet. If the system is a wrong system, Pope Leo XIII said, "a remedy must be found, and found quickly." But you cannot fire a pistol and change the wrong into right. Sometimes you have to go on enduring a wrong system, not so much for the saints that are in it, but because it may be much worse to try to change it violently, like killing the patient if you attempt to move him.

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St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us that it is not Justice that brings Peace. But before you can have any possibility of Peace there must be Justice. Justice removes the obstacles to Peace. If we at present endeavoured to make all our corporate relations a relation of Justice (how that is to be done I really do not know), even then that would not bring Peace. Justice only removes the impediments to Peace. Justice opens the shutters. But if you open the shutters at night, no light comes through. It is no use opening the flood-gates if there is no water in the river. Justice must open the shutters, but Peace cannot come till Love comes in. Yet now there seems to be hardly any study even of the implications of Justice. I do not understand it. It is like trying to make bricks without straw. I do not understand it. St. Thomas says—and you find it in the Gospels—Peace will not come till everything Justice demands has been done, and you have removed the impediments to Peace. But only when *Love* comes will there be Peace, not until then.

I think, personally, that just as it is necessary to have Divine Revelation and Faith to make it possible to know quite a number of things our Reason could find out for itself, if we only took the trouble, so is that *natural* love, which would naturally bring Peace, now practically impossible. We now require a supernatural love. By Justice we give to others all that is theirs; by Charity we give to others something that is *ours*; and until we do that, there is no possibility of Peace. The modern world has turned its back on God. We shall never get the natural love of human beings for each other without an influx of Divine Love.

To-day it is exceedingly difficult to escape from the regions of hate. St. Augustine reminds us that we must hate the sin, but love the sinners. Even if we hate their sins, we must love them in such a way that we look upon ourselves as the greatest sinners. We need not say we have their sins; a total abstainer could not say he was drunk. But the sin of despising the sinner would be much worse than physical intemperance.

In the days when Our Beloved Lord was “steadfastly setting His face” to go up to Jerusalem and death, trampling

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down every argument for hating everybody, and steadfastly setting His Face towards the Cross, you would be astounded to read that the "Samaritans received Him not." You remember, of course, the anger of James and John, a sort of righteous anger, the sort of righteous anger appearing recently in almost every Catholic paper. They asked Our Lord to send fire down on the Samaritans. It would not have been a sin. It might have been a right. It seemed almost to be a duty. But think of the unutterable mercy of Our Lord! "Turning, He rebuked them." He was almost angry that they were human. He was not angry with the Samaritans, but angry with those who were angry with the Samaritans. One might almost say He reserved the intimacies of His anger for His chosen ones. Were there any human eyes that could see in that a harvest? It seemed a harvest of death; a harvest of hate. This hate meant the death of the hated. Yet Our Lord, perhaps a few hours later, said so quietly, when naming those who were to go before Him with His spirit: "You are going into the harvest. You are not going out into a battle-field to destroy, but into a harvest-field to reap, to gather into barns." Oh, what eyes had Christ! But of course He looked through those eyes with His heart, not with His mind. It was His heart that was looking out that day through His human eyes, perhaps dim with tears; and He saw a great harvest. You and I would have been counting our coming wounds. He was counting the possible sheaves, asking for harvesters with His eyes and heart to come into that harvest-field, so soon to be stained with His blood.

I am quite certain the world is demanding nothing so much as those eyes and that heart, to see in the world a harvest-field. And what is going to give eyes of such hope except a heart that is full of Love? We cannot come to the fulness of Truth unless we love Truth. We can never give Truth in all its fulness to any human being unless we not only love Truth but also love the one to whom it is given. In these days when hate seems so obvious and natural, we must pray for Love. The harvest is great. If any sort of statistics seem to say otherwise, I think we had better not read them. There are certain things that cannot be measured

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by a foot rule. There is no arithmetic in Love, no mathematics of Divine Charity; and if any of the statistics of men seem to argue there are some men we must hate, let them be taken as read, while we turn to the realities of Love and go out confidently into the modern world knowing that Our Blessed Lord brought Peace, and that without the supernatural virtue of Charity—Love of God and of our neighbour for God's sake—there will be no lasting Peace.

Here is an extraordinary phenomenon. Though Our Lord said to souls "Go in Peace," He never once approached the group of His Apostles with the salutation "Peace be to you" until He died; because He is very punctilious in fulfilling all His promises. He promised to die. He would not insist on anything until He had died. It is as if He said, "Wait till I am dead." There was a great collective sin. They put Him to death. He came back with Peace. "Now I bring you Peace." That is simply an infinite idea; against all the laws of everything, fanatical almost. But that is the reality of the Catholic Church. Jesus is God, and He never approached the human race with the salutation "Peace be to you" until He had died for us. That is a profound idea, a central idea of our spiritual life. And if anything in our spiritual life is at issue with that, then we are not in Peace, only in Concord. There is not one of us who is not bound in intimate relationship with countless human beings. Our relations with them must be in every way those of Justice. But that is not enough. When we give them everything that is theirs, we are beginning to open the shutters. But now the light must spread. We must open the flood-gates so that the great waters of Love may pour through.

How wonderful it is to see, after the death of a beloved one, those who love feeling the agony of parting with anything that belonged to the beloved. Imagine, if we love God, what an agony it would be to feel enmity towards anybody He loves. What a programme for the world—the poor distracted world of to-day! And what a programme for you and me in our search for union with God!

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