

Pope Francis' Message for the 54th World Day of Peace 1st January 2021

At the beginning of every year, the Holy Father offers his thoughts on a theme connected to peace. This year's message is entitled *The Culture of Care as a Path to Peace*. He offers it to "Heads of State and Government, leaders of International Organisations, spiritual leaders and followers of different religions, and to men and women of good will"; it is not just for Catholics or even Christians. He begins this year's reflection expressing sympathy with all who have lost loved ones in the COVID-19 pandemic, and with those who have lost their jobs because of it, and he thanks "physicians and nurses, pharmacists, researchers, volunteers, chaplains and the personnel of hospitals and healthcare centres", as well as all those involved developing vaccines. At the same time, he mentions negative developments in different parts of the world. What runs through all these aspects of life in 2020 is an awareness of "how important it is to care for one another"; he says "a culture of care" can "combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time".

God entrusted the earth, particularly the Garden of Eden, to Adam, to "till it and keep it" (*Genesis 2, 15*). God showed how much He trusted Adam "by making him master and guardian of all creation". When God asked Cain where Abel was, Cain clearly felt guilty when he admitted he had not behaved as his brother's keeper. 'Keeping' and 'caring' are key factors in the story of humanity, but they don't always go well, do they? God is the primary carer for every creature, and ideas about the sabbath, Jubilees and letting fields lie fallow every seventh year are signs of respect and care for creation. The Father's love for humanity is revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus, in what He did for people who were sick in body and spirit and for sinners. The Good Shepherd cared for His sheep and offered Himself on the Cross "to set us free from the slavery of sin and death. By the sacrificial gift of His life, He opened for us the path of love. To each of us He says, 'Follow me; go and do likewise' (*cf. Luke 10, 37*)". Since then Christians have tried to live by the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. "They strove to make their community a welcoming home, concerned for every human need and ready to care for those most in need. It became customary to make voluntary offerings in order to feed the poor, bury the dead and care for orphans the elderly and the victims of shipwrecks". Christ's followers have often practised an 'instinctive' charity, which is a hallmark of genuine Christianity.

Pope Francis believes the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, developed over the last 130 years, can be the basis of the culture of care we need to honour and promote the dignity of every single human being, to work for the common good, to live in solidarity with people who are poor and vulnerable, and to care for and protect creation. He hopes those who are in a position to influence society will use the principles embedded in Catholic Social Doctrine to establish fairer economic relationships between the different groups in our societies and between nations, in the process guaranteeing not only justice but also peace. He recognises the need for families, schools and universities to educate every person to recognise and respect their own and every other person's rights and duties. "The culture of care thus calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance" - <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/17/0671/01553.html#en>