

## ***Witness to Peace; Announce Peace***

Rome, March 16th, 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are living in tragic times of violence and destruction. To the 24 wars already being waged, another, even more disturbing for the whole of humanity, is being added. So many people of good will, from every station in life and religion, wish to disassociate themselves from the proposals of death that offend both God and man. They are saying 'enough' to war, to violence, to overwhelming injustice and to every form of terrorism, 'enough' to the unbridled desire for power, to social injustice and to the social imbalances that are at the core of every discord and division.

We Franciscans cannot remain silent, on the fringes of this movement for life. St. Francis asks us to be makers of peace wherever we may live:

- Through constant and intensified *prayer* during this privileged time of Lent: personal and prolonged prayer, more constant prayer in Fraternity, together with the people that frequent our churches in order to ask God for pardon and peace. The hope of peace is reborn and strengthened precisely from this dialogue with God, who helps us to resituate our existence in the harmony of relationships. Prayer is always openness and encounter, it is always a stage in the reconciliation with ourselves, with others and with God.
- Through our harmonious *pacified life* re-centred on God. We will be bearers of peace when we are pacified among ourselves.
- Through our *dialoguing presence* in the midst of men and women of good will, going out to meet all, friend and foe, accepting and appreciating all desires for communion. Each Friar and each Fraternity must find the means and instruments to express this kind of presence in the ambience in which he lives.
- Through *fasting and penance*. Hunger kills just like war, and even more than war: we must involve ourselves in fraternal sharing. St. Francis reminds us that everything comes from the one God, Father of all, and all should be shared with others as a simple duty of restitution. Fasting directed to God and to sharing is a very important instrument of peace since it helps to purify us from the

thirst for possession, from all the superfluous we have, which is always a form of violence towards the poor. Fasting and penance support our prayer and confirm the truth of our word.

- Through the *explicit annunciation* of peace done with courage and creativity in Fraternity. Each one is responsible, in accordance with his role, for this commitment and is obliged to announce peace through his life and word. St. Francis reminds us that silence can be culpable and inaction can become a “shame” (cf. *LP 44*). We cannot give ourselves over to a sterile resignation: the admirable example of the Holy Father, John Paul II, must spur us on to use all possible means to construct peace and reconciliation.

Brothers and Sisters, as Franciscans we are called to become *prophets of peace*, men and women that know how to catch a glimpse of and to follow the paths of peace along with other people; who know how to make fraternal gestures of reconciliation and communion; who are courageous witnesses to love, because the God of peace has not abandoned us and every seed of fraternity that is cast on the field of the world will undoubtedly bear fruit.

We are called to be prophets of peace that, with gospel wisdom, know how to live and announce Christian hope, which is founded on the fidelity of God towards mankind, despite the critical and difficult times that we are living. We must have our eyes fixed on the mercy of the Father to which we are all in debt.

We are called, as *prophets* and as *Franciscans*, to live and proclaim with gospel simplicity that mercy of God towards all, “bad men as well as good, honest and dishonest men alike” (cf. *Mt 5, 45*). Only in this way can we avoid all forms of fundamentalism, terrorism, threat or vendetta, that are always nourished on a partial or reductive vision of life, with the risk of spreading terror, war and death all around us.

May the Virgin of peace intercede for us!

God our Father, You see this our earth, bloodstained by so many wars and tested by so much suffering; once again, even more than in the past, the victims of hatred are innocent civilians, women and children. We offer You this pain as a sacrifice that we unite to that of Your Son on the Cross for the redemption of the world.

Lord, we ask You for the gift of peace: make us instruments of Your peace!

Br. Giacomo Bini, OFM

Minister General