

Being a peacemaker - Leela Ramdeen, Raja Yoga Event on Fri 21 Sept 2018

Today the world observes the *International Day of Peace*. The theme this year is: “*The Right to Peace - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70.*”

I have had the honour of spending some time in Madhuban, in Mt Abu, Rajasthan, India, and of meeting 3 of the Dadis - the late Dadi Prakashmani (died Apl 2007), Dadi Gulzar and Dadi Janki. It was Dadi Janki who wrote some time ago that "the call of this time is a call for peace."

Members of the Brahma Kumaris chant: "I am a peaceful soul." They teach about "soul-consciousness" that peace is the original state of the soul.

For Catholics, "peace" is an ongoing gift from God – a gift that keeps going, but as God's instruments on this earth, we have a responsibility to build peace; to be peacemakers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God." (Matthew 5:9). Blessed Paul VI said: “The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it.” Peace is about right order and right relationships – as divinely ordained by God, and “can only come about when we learn to treat each other as brothers and sisters and recognise our shared vocation as children of God.”

The UN General Assembly has declared this as “a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples”. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres says: “It is time all nations and all people live up to the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human race. This year marks the 70th anniversary of that landmark document.”

Since the Universal Declaration does not include a separate article on ‘The Right to Peace’, we are asked to reflect on what “The Right to Peace” means to each of us. Countries are a long way from implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which UN Member States signed in 2015.

To achieve meaningful peace, we must address the critical issues outlined in these SDGs e.g. “poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice”.

SDG16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' calls for "promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. A peaceful society is one where there is justice and equality for everyone. Peace will enable a sustainable environment to take shape and a sustainable environment will help promote peace."

In January this year, Pope Francis, in his Peace Message, asked us to "embrace those who endure perilous journeys and hardships in order to find peace. He urges people of faith to turn with a 'contemplative gaze' towards migrants and refugees, opening our hearts to the 'gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their houses, in their streets and squares'." (www.usccb.org).

What more can you and I do to act on the four mileposts for action he laid down: *welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees*? It is encouraging to note the number of parishes that have established Migrants and Refugees Ministries. These men, women, and children are also in search of peace.

And remember, we will not attain peace until we reconcile with God's Creation. We continue to destroy our environment with impunity. Last weekend there was a beach cleanup and community members came out in their numbers to clean the foreshore. They collected half a ton of rubbish. And you would have seen the photo being circulated on Facebook of the rubbish left after the recent T20 cricket match at the Stadium. Trinbago Knight Riders won, and while we have cause to celebrate, it's sad that many who attended the event did not see it fit to take their rubbish home. To build peace, we need a change of mindset about our responsibility to protect our environment from degradation.

If we don't make peace with Creation; if we don't reconcile with God's Creation, we will suffer dire consequences. Human development and environmental ecology are inextricably linked. We were created to cultivate and care for creation (Genesis 2:15). In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI said to us: "Our earth speaks to us, and we must listen if we want to survive." Are we listening?

We live in a world in which we all yearn for peace and harmony, yet many of us expect someone else to build peace. We see it as a task for others. Well, it's about time we get out of our comfort zones and recognise the role we have to play in being peacemakers. While we recall the rights outlined in the Declaration of Human Rights, let us not forget that for each right there is a corresponding responsibility. And although there is no right for peace contained in the Declaration, because we are made by our Creator as peaceful souls, we have a duty/ a responsibility to build peace.

Many of us here today belong to a particular faith community. Our credibility and authenticity as people of faith depend on the way in which we live our lives and give witness to the teachings of our faith. To do this effectively, we need to inform our consciences and develop our awareness of the many obstacles that stand in the way of us attaining peace.

God created us as peaceful souls. But we are too own way, as we say in TT. We allow ourselves to be attracted by things that distract us from being who we really are. Sadly, we live in a time when selfishness, greed, individualism, and moral relativism threaten to overwhelm us - to prevent us from being who we really are.

But if we believe that good overcomes evil and that light dispels darkness, we will weather any storm. It was Blessed Pope Paul VI who said: "If you want peace, work for justice." As long as there are grave injustices in the world there will never be peace.

Being a peacemaker involves standing in solidarity with each other - recognising that, as Blessed Pope Paul VI said: "Solidarity is a call to recognise each individual person as a part of one human family." Solidarity means that "loving our neighbour" is not only for those in our vicinity or community, or for those whom we like, but solidarity has global implications in our interdependent world. It means being concerned for people where ever they live. So, when we speak about building peace, we don't only want peace for ourselves and our immediate family, but for all God's children across the world, and for His Creation.

Peace and the promotion of peace require daily, constant effort from you and me. Hope is a virtue that most faith communities embrace. People of hope believe that peace is possible.

However, peace will not be achieved if we remain in our comfort zones and fail to take action to build God's Kingdom of justice, peace, truth, love and freedom.

Peace-making is an active process. Pope Francis states: "We must cultivate peace daily, with our own hands, so that it spreads to the rest of our suffering world." (16 Feb 2017).

He said in his 2017 Peace Message: "If violence has its source in the human heart, then it is fundamental that non-violence be practised before all else within families... The politics of non-violence have to begin in the home and then spread to the entire human family.

The words of one of my favourite hymn echo this demand: "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me". Peace has to begin with me. I cannot expect of another what I won't and don't do myself. In the Catholic Church we have developed a Movement titled: "*Non-violence begins with me*". You and I can make a difference. Join this Movement (call: 625-6730). Let's celebrate each small step we take to promote peace.

Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. It is the simple daily gestures that will help us to build peace.

My words and actions should and must reflect the Christ in me as I respect the Christ in others. Justice is the only way to achieving that peace: loving and caring for others as Christ loves and cares for me. So that by our actions, our lives radiate the peace we receive as a gift from God. But remember, none of us can build peace alone. We need to work in concert with each other.

Mother Teresa said: "What you can do, I can't do, and what I can do, you can't do, but together we can do something beautiful for God." We need all hands on deck!

Pope St John Paul II reminded us that "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements. Like a cathedral, peace has to be constructed, patiently and with unshakeable faith.

Wherever the strong exploit the weak; wherever the rich take advantage of the poor; wherever great powers seek to dominate and to impose ideologies, there the work of

making peace is undone; there the cathedral of peace is again destroyed ...I invite you to pray with me for the cause of peace.” (Holy Mass of Pentecost in Coventry, Homily of John Paul II, 30 May 1982).

While it is true that peace is not just the absence of war, let us remember that there are countless wars being waged globally at this very moment. Violence seems endemic across the world. Countries are spending trillions of dollars on weapons of mass destruction while many of their citizens go hungry and live in abject poverty. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is right: “Stability and peace ...will not come from the barrel of a gun, because peace without justice is an impossibility.”

The Bengali poet, Sri Chinmoy, reminds us that "peace has no enemies. War forgets peace. Our vital passions want war. Our psychic emotions desire peace. Peace comes from within." Reflection and meditation are important if we are to attain inner peace. I received a facebook post that showed a young woman sitting in the lotus position, eyes closed, saying: "I want inner peace. Hurry up!" We live in a time of instant gratification. Everyone is in a hurry. Unfortunately, attaining inner peace is a process that takes time to achieve; it requires us to carve out time during our busy day to empty our minds of all the stresses and strains of daily life and delve down into our true selves. Teaching your mind to be still, and to be mindful of the here and now, is a process is not achieved overnight, but it is worth practising.

Often what stands in the way of peace, is the lust that some people have for power. But the late singer, Jimi Hendrix was right when he said: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace".

Mahatma Gandhi said: “Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the **heart**, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being.” You and I can be part of the solution. But first we have to do as Pope Francis says and “say ‘no’ to hatred and violence – with action – and ‘yes’ to fraternity and reconciliation.”

Today, let us renew our resolve to do as Gandhi said and “BE the change” we “wish to see in the world.” Or, as the BKs say: "When we change, the world changes."

The UN shares some simple steps that we can take to build peace e.g. seek peaceful resolution of conflict when disagreements arise around you; prevent an injustice at home, school, at work, or in your community by adopting a non-violent approach to problem solving and reporting potential crimes, including online bullying; speak up

when others are at risk and stand with others' human rights at work, at school, at home, in communities.

We know that life is full of trials and tribulations and that we must pray constantly to obtain the grace of inner peace, which for Catholics is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis stated on 16 May 2017:

"...the peace that Jesus gives is a gift: it is a gift of the Holy Spirit.' This peace, he stressed, lasts through tribulations and beyond, and 'cannot be bought. Without its crosses, it's not real,' he said.

The peace of God, the Pope pointed out, is "a gift that keeps us going. God's peace is real peace, that enters the reality of life, that does not deny life; that is life. There is suffering, there are the sick people, there are many bad things, there are wars ... but that peace within, which is a gift, is not lost, but goes ahead bearing the Cross and suffering.

"Peace without the Cross is not the peace of Jesus: it is a peace that can be bought. But it does not last; it comes to an end. When I get angry I lose peace,' the Pope said. 'When my heart is 'troubled,' it is because I am not open to the peace of Jesus, because I am unable to bear life as it comes, with its crosses and sorrows that accompany it.' However, we must be able to ask for the grace to ask the Lord for his peace, one which enables us 'not to lose *that* inner peace.'"

Recognise the enemies of peace:

- Psalm 34:13-14: Malice must be banished from your tongue,

Deceitful conversation from your lips;

never yield to evil, practice good, seek peace, pursue it.

- anger; gossiping and spreading wicked rumours about others; bullying - including cyber-bullying; verbal and physical threats; ostracism; all forms of violence - physical, emotional, financial etc; sexual harassment; corruption; being self-centred; intimidating others.

What characteristics will help us to build peace? Openness; humility; being a good listener; being empathetic; being a good communicator; willing to dialogue and co-operate; courage; taking responsibility for one's actions; good governance.

*** Remember to encourage our **youth** to be peacemakers also. - too often we see youth as perpetrators of violence. We need to engage them - seek their views and make spaces for them to express their opinions to decision-makers and to society. Give them opportunities to be heard. E.g. CCSJ's Spoken Word Competition in October on Care for Creation.

Arts, sports (e.g. conflict management through sports), media, personal relationships - teach peace. ***Inter-generational exchange - build inclusive communities.

*****Sustainable peace building is a long term project. I end with The Prayer of St. Francis:**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

At the end of the day, love will bring us peace. May we clothe ourselves with unconditional love for God, neighbour, Creation and self - yes, self. Too many of us are not at peace with ourselves. And may each of us sow seeds of peace as we journey on in life. Thank you.

Building blocks for PEACE

Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ & Director, CREDI

"The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it. - Blessed Paul VI

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The UN General Assembly has declared this as "a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples." UN Secretary-General, António Guterres says: "It is time all nations and all people live up to the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human race. This year marks the 70th anniversary of that landmark document."

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mileposts for action he laid down: *welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating?* It is encouraging to note the number of parishes that have established *Migrants and Refugees Ministries*. These men, women, and children are also in search of peace.

And remember, we will not attain peace until we reconcile with God's Creation. Today, 16 Sept, we observe the *International Day for the preservation of the Ozone Layer*, that "fragile shield of gas, protects the Earth from the harmful portion of the rays of the sun, thus helping preserve life on the planet" (UN). While we welcome the new mandate of the 30-year-old Montreal Protocol, let us celebrate the accomplishments generated by this Protocol e.g. the "phase-out of controlled uses of ozone depleting substances and the related reductions have not only helped protect the ozone layer for this and future generations, but have also contributed significantly to global efforts to address climate change; furthermore, it has protected human health and ecosystems by limiting the harmful ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth"(www.un.org).

Our world is sorely ill. There are countless wars being waged globally at this moment. Violence seems endemic across the world. Countries are spending trillions of dollars on weapons of mass destruction while many of their citizens go hungry and live in abject poverty. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is right: "Stability and peace ...will not come from the barrel of a gun, because peace without justice is an impossibility."

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CCSJ REFLECTION

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

