

Unarmed and Disarming Peace

US Independence Day

July 4, 2025

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First Reading (Isaiah 58: 6-12)

Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: "Here I am!" If you remove the yoke from among you, the accusing finger, and malicious speech; If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail. Your people shall rebuild the ancient ruins; the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; "Repairer of the breach," they shall call you, "Restorer of ruined dwellings."

Second Reading (James 4:13-18)

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

Gospel (Matthew 5:1-12)

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you
falsely because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who
were before you.

On this first Independence Day with a pope from the United States, we celebrate our country and the fact that we have a global religious leader produced by our great nation. In his first appearance as Pope Leo XIV, his very first word was 'peace.' In the short speech that followed his introduction from the balcony at St. Peter Basilica, he mentioned peace seven more times. Of course, we should expect a pope to talk about peace and should also expect a preacher to talk about peace on Independence Day. Peace is a nice ideal that everyone agrees with. What I found fascinating, however, was that Pope Leo added two qualifiers to the word peace during his short speech. He called for an 'unarmed' and a 'disarming' peace. This type of peace is much more controversial, especially for powerful nations such as our own, but is much more in line with the Bible. The scripture readings chosen for today's mass are all about an unarmed and disarming peace.

Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah speaks about doing the works of charity and justice. This includes releasing those bound unjustly, setting free the oppressed, sharing our bread with the hungry, and taking care of the homeless. These are the fasts that God desires, not simply devotional practices that make us feel better about ourselves. That is because the Bible knows that injustice and unmet needs are usually the causes of violence and war. If we want peace, in the famous words of Pope St. Paul VI, we must work for justice.' If we want peace, we must strive to meet everyone's basic needs. For us, this may require spending more money on aid and bread than on bombs and weapons.

In our second reading from St. James, the author reminds us to avoid bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Both of these are real temptations for those who have power. We want what others have and will step on other people to get there. Wisdom, according to St. James, cannot be found this way. Wisdom is found through humility. In complex situations, including internationally, we need a lot more wisdom and humility, not jealousy and ambition, if we want peace.

Finally, in our Gospel we hear the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' clearest teachings on how we are to live as his followers. In the Beatitudes, he says, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." An important step in peacemaking is to recognize that all people are

already made in the image of God. Violence and war, no matter how legitimate or justifiable, are not just destroying the enemy, but they are destroying the image of God within the enemy.

Peacemakers want everyone on all sides to realize that we are all children of God. This is a disarming approach to life.

As we can see, Biblical peace is more demanding than the peace so many people in the world talk about. As our first reading suggested, peace is not about suppressing people and saying this is just how life is for the masses of humanity. As our second reading said, peace is not brought about through jealousy and selfishness so that we can feel powerful and in control. As our Gospel taught, peace is not about us being made in the image of God, but not our enemy.

An unarmed and disarming peace, as Pope Leo called it, is the peace of the Bible. It is about allowing ourselves to become much more vulnerable and less defensive by building up those on the margins, showing profound humility, and becoming child-like in following the teachings of Jesus. This is the peace, in the words of Isaiah, that will repair and restore. It is the peace that heals the wounds.

On this Fourth of July holiday, let us pray for peace in our country and in our world. Not the peace as the world gives, but the unarmed and disarming peace that Jesus gives.