

CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION OF PEOPLES

ENCYCLICAL BY HIS HOLINESS POPE
BENEDICT XV.

Following is an authorised translation of the full text of the Encyclical on the Christian Reconciliation of Peoples, issued by Pope Benedict XV. on Pentecost Sunday, May 23:—

To the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops and Ordinaries in peace and communion with the Holy See.

Venerable brethren, health and Apostolic Benediction.

Peace, the great gift of God, than which, in St. Augustine's words, there is no happier thing among men, nothing more desirable or better; peace, which all good people have implored for more than four years, with the prayers of the faithful and the tears of mothers, has finally begun to shine among the peoples, and we are among the first to rejoice at it. But still too many and too bitter anxieties disturb this Our paternal joy, for if almost everywhere the war has in a way come to an end, and several treaties of peace have been signed, nevertheless the germs of old bitterness remain; and you know well, venerable brethren, that no peace can have consistency, no alliance can have strength, though elaborated in daily laborious conferences and solemnly sanctioned, if at the same time hatreds and enmities are not quenched by means of a reconciliation based on mutual charity.

It is on this consideration, which is full of anxiety and dangers, that We wish to dwell, venerable brethren, that at the same time the peoples entrusted to your care may have it brought home to them.

Exerted Power for Peace.

In truth, ever since by the hidden designs of God We were raised to the See of Peter, We have never ceased to do everything in Our power, from the very beginning of the war, that all nations of the world might resume cordial relations among themselves. To that end We never ceased to pray, to repeat exhortations, to propose ways of arrangement, to try every means, in fact, to open by Divine aid a door of some sort to a peace that might be just, honorable, and lasting; and at the same time We exercised all Our paternal care to alleviate everywhere that terrible load of sorrow and disaster of every sort accompanying the immense tragedy.

And now, just as from the beginning of Our troubled Pontificate, the charity of Jesus Christ led Us to work for the return of peace and to alleviate the horrors of war, so now that a certain peace has been finally concluded, it is this same charity which urges Us to exhort all the children of the Church, or, better, all men in the world, that they may put aside the old bitterness and give place to mutual love and concord.

There is no need for Us to dwell long on showing how humanity is incurring the risk of terrible disasters if, while peace indeed is concluded, latent hostility and enmity among the peoples continue. No need to dwell on the harm to all that is fruit of civilization and progress, to commerce and industry, literature, and the arts, all of which flourish only when the peoples live together in tranquillity.

But, more important still, grave harm would be done to the very life of Christianity, which is essentially based on charity, being called the very preaching of the Law of Christ, "the gospel of peace."

Indeed, as you well know and as We have often called to mind, nothing was so often and so insistently taught by the Divine Master to His disciples as this precept of fraternal charity is the one which includes all the others in itself; and Our Lord called that precept new and His own, desiring that it should be as the hall-mark of the Christians, by which they might easily be distinguished from all others.

No other, indeed, was the testament that He left to His followers when He died, praying them to love one another, and loving one another try to imitate the ineffable unity that exists between the Persons of the Holy Trinity: "That they may be one as We also are one, that they be made perfect in one."

And the Apostles, following the order of the Divine Master and taught by His very voice, were unceasing in their exhortation to the faithful: "But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves"; "and above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection"; "dearly beloved, let us love one another, for charity is of God."

The teaching of Jesus Christ and of the Apostles was faithfully observed by Our brethren of the old times, who belonged indeed to different nations, often at war among themselves, but who nevertheless wiped out the record of past differences in voluntary oblivion and lived in perfect concord.

And indeed there was marked contrast between such intimate union of minds and hearts and the deadly hostilities that then broke out among the nations.

What has already been said to teach the precept of charity holds good for the pardoning of offences, no less solemnly commanded by the Lord: "But I say to you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you, that you may be the children of your Father Who is in Heaven, Who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad." Hence that terribly severe warning of the Apostle St. John: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in himself."

Forgiveness of Enemies.

Finally, Jesus Christ has taught us to pray the Lord, so that we ask for forgiveness on condition of forgiving others: "And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." And if sometimes the observance of this law seems to be severe and difficult, the Redeemer of the human race Himself assists us not only with the Divine Grace but also by His admirable example, for as He hung on the Cross He prayed pardon of His Father for those who so unjustly and wickedly tortured Him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

We, too, should be the first to imitate the pity and loving kindness of Jesus Christ, whose Vicar We are here, though without any merit of Our own: with all Our heart, following His example, We forgive all any every one of Our enemies who knowingly or unknowingly have heaped and are still heaping on Our person and Our work every sort of vituperation, and We embrace all with supreme charity and benevolence, neglecting no opportunity to do them all the good in Our power, and that is indeed what Christians really worthy of the name are bound to do towards those from whom they have received offences during the war.

Christian charity, in fact, is not confined to not hating our enemies and loving them as brothers; it desires also that we do good to them, following the rule of the Divine Master, Who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil," and ran the course of His mortal life giving it all up to doing untold good to men, even shedding His blood for them. So said St. John: "In this we have known the charity of God, because He hath laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. He that hath the substance of this world and shall see his brother in need and shall shut up his bowels from him, how doth the charity of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Days of Sorrow.

Never indeed was there a time when we should "spread the limits of charity" more than in these days of universal suffering and sorrow; never perhaps as to-day has humanity needed that common beneficence which grows from sincere love of our neighbor and is full of sacrifice and fervor. For if we look anywhere