

# A Pastoral Letter in response to the recent violence in America



*"Since we are justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God... Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:1-2.5). In this passage, Saint Paul gives us much to reflect upon.*

Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: *"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:19). That life becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God's grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit.*

Pope Francis: BULL OF INDICTION OF THE ORDINARY JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2025

**PEACE  
BEGINS  
WITH *Us***

**The Mystical Body of Christ, The Church**



# ***On Authentic Peace in an Age of Violence: A Pastoral Letter to the Faithful***

*To the Parishioners and Friends of St. Augustine Catholic Church; Our academic community at the University of Florida & Santa Fe College; and all who are searching for the Love that bring Peace to our restless hearts, Grace and Peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## ***I. Salutation and Introduction: Witnessing the 'Signs of the Times'***

***My friends, brothers and sisters in Christ,***

*I write to you today as we continue to reflect on the solemn memory of the September 11th attacks, a day of profound tragedy 24 years ago whose consequences continue to reverberate in our lives, in our nation, and in the geopolitics of the world. In the years since, we have become witnesses to a consequential rise of violence, not only in distant lands but with increasing and alarming frequency here at home. We have seen a growing pattern of violence born of political and sectarian hatred, and of the suffering that flows from the spiritual brokenness of our fallen world, often manifesting in unaddressed mental illness. We pray for the soul of Charlie Kirk, the most recent victim of political violence in America, for his wife and children and for healing of those present at the Utah Valley University who were traumatized. We pray for souls of those who were killed, their families, and those affected by the deadly attack at a Catholic church in Minnesota filled with students attending Mass, and those killed, their families and all affected by the violent attack at a Colorado High School. We are also mindful of and pray for the family of the Ukrainian refugee, Iryna Zarutka, killed this past August in Charlotte. We entrust all victims of such violence to God, our Heavenly Father and the author of every human life.*

*This tide of violence is not confined to our own country. We are witnesses to wars and conflicts across the globe—in Europe, the Middle East, the African continent, and the Americas—where political, sectarian, ideological, and ethnically motivated violence affects millions of innocent people. Therefore, with a pastor's heart, I feel compelled to offer this reflection. It is my hope to look beyond the symptoms of this global unrest and guided by the light of the Gospel and the perennial wisdom of the Church, to illuminate the spiritual roots of this violence and point toward the one true path to the authentic peace our souls so deeply desire.*

*As authentic missionary disciples of Christ we ought to avoid contextualizing Church teaching and the practice of the faith in socio-political terms such as conservative or liberal. Rather, we speak in terms of 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxis'. We must condemn violence as a normative way of resolving conflicts and call upon all to name and address the underlying causes, and to do so speaking truth in charity in the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

## ***II. The Diagnosis of Our Unrest: A World That Rejects Its Creator***

*Before we can embrace the remedy, we must first have the courage to make a correct diagnosis. The various forms of violence we witness, from personal attacks to international wars, share a common spiritual source. They are the bitter fruit of ideologies that promise a false salvation by embracing the messages of false prophets. At their core, these ideologies are rooted in the rejection of the authentic nature, dignity, and value of the human person as created and loved by God. In the face of this unrest, the world offers superficial solutions that are destined to fail. The peace we truly need cannot be legislated into existence, nor can it be realized through mere social contracts. The empty and impossible call to simply "coexist" fails to address the fundamental conflict raging within the human heart.*

*The ultimate source of this conflict is the consequence of original sin: the rejection of the truths of God. When humanity turns away from its Creator, society becomes a battleground for the supremacy of individual wills. "My will," we say to one another, "Not yours." This is an automatic setup for conflict, for war. In such a world, where every person seeks to be his own god, there can be no victory, only the shared loss of our common humanity. This foundational rejection of God does not exist in a vacuum; it is actively preached and promoted by influential voices who offer a counterfeit salvation.*

### **III. The Secular Evangelists: Counterfeit Gospels in the Modern World**

*In our modern age, the rejection of God is not merely a passive reality; it is actively and effectively promoted. We face a powerful and coordinated "preaching of the leaders of the secular world 'church,'" who are remarkably effective at apologetics and evangelization for their secular and synthesized secular-Christian beliefs. They are exceedingly adept at using the powerful tools of modern communication to indoctrinate the masses, spreading a counterfeit gospel that stands in direct opposition to the mission of Christ and His Church.*

***This indoctrination occurs through two primary channels:***

- The Entertainment Industry: Our culture is saturated with media that provides excessive brutality and violence as entertainment. Can we truly believe that our increasingly violent world, a world suffering from so many psychological distortions, has no connection to the violent media we consume? We do so at great cost.*
- Modern Technology: This secular evangelization is delivered directly into our hands and homes through personal devices. These doctrines are presented in addictively inescapable forms, making young people, to whom so much of this content is aimed, particularly susceptible to this ceaseless indoctrination.*

*The message of the secular world, often united with those who favor a "Christian lite" version of the faith, vigorously advocates against and misrepresents the moral and spiritual teachings of the Church. They argue that the Church's teachings, which were given to us by Christ for our salvation, are: Repressive, Unrealistic, Intolerant, Non-inclusive, and Outdated. That they are fundamentally opposed to an enlightened modern understanding of what it means to be human.*

*This includes their dogmatic reframing of the love and mercy of Jesus, in which our Lord is reduced to a "powerless empty waif who just came to make people feel good about themselves." This false Christ makes no demands, calls for no conversion, and offers no path to true freedom. Having rejected the authentic Gospel, they propose that the Church should abandon the truths revealed by the Creator and instead democratically determine a new set of truths crafted for our own selfish good. This is the false promise of the world, a world where truth is hard to find amid the lies which are everywhere like wolves masquerading as sheep.*

### **IV. The Divine Remedy: The Universal Call to Holiness**

*Against the chaos, violence, and counterfeit gospels of the age, Christ offers the one authentic and divine remedy. The only path to the peace we seek is supernatural, a grace that flows from God alone. It begins with heeding the radical command of our Lord in the Gospel: "To you who hear I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you... Be merciful just as your father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:27-28, 36-37) This is not a polite suggestion; it is a divine command that stands in total opposition to the world's logic of power, retaliation, and self-interest. It is a command we can only fulfill through the grace of God.*

*Herein lies the heart of the matter: uncompromisingly responding to the universal call to holiness is the remedy for that which ails the people of God and the world. Within the soul of every human being is a fundamental orientation to know, love, and serve God. The path to sainthood, therefore, is not an extraordinary vocation for a select few, but the very means by which we realize the fullness of our humanity as intended by our Creator.*

*The essential means to achieve this holiness is the Most Holy Eucharist. As the "source and summit of Christian life," the Eucharist is the definitive "answer in every generation since the last supper of Christ." It is in receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord that we are transformed, strengthened, and made capable of living out the seemingly impossible love to which we are called.*

*When people of good will pray for peace, God's answer is direct and consistent. He does not offer a political strategy or a social program. He offers a personal transformation: Peace will come when you give your heart to me. Peace will come into you in the name of my son. Peace will be inflamed in you by my Holy Spirit. Then you will become the instrument of peace in the world. This is the only peace that can save us. It is not a peace we fabricate, but a peace we receive. It is a divine fire we receive in order to become instruments of His peace, passing that fire one to another, drawing others into the heart of Christ.*

### ***V. A Call to the Faithful: Becoming Instruments of God's Peace***

*My dear brothers and sisters, this divine remedy requires a response from each of us. God pours out grace upon grace for the salvation of the world, but too often we walk around with umbrellas up, allowing His life-giving grace to miss us entirely. I urge you today: close those umbrellas. In a spirit of humble surrender, let us raise our arms, raise our eyes to heaven and beg God: "Transform me and use me to transform the world."*

*Our primary mission as the Church must be to remain radically faithful to the mission of Christ, which is to make the salvific truths of the Gospel known and understood. It is only in fidelity to these challenging divine truths that we can become the light of God that draws all people out of darkness. In this turbulent world, let us not lose heart. Our hope is not in human solutions but in the unwavering promise of God. Let us hold fast to the words of the Psalmist, which give voice to our supernatural hope: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)*

*This is the unshakable foundation upon which we stand.*

*Commending you all to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, and to the intercession of the saints, I petition God to pour out the graces we need to become instruments of God's peace that surpasses all understanding.*

***Sincerely yours in Christ,***

***Father Blair Gaynes, Pastor & Director of St. Augustine Catholic Church and Student Center***