

Reflection -

An extract from the Bishop of Down and Connor's homily on the Pope's World Peace Day message and its challenge in Northern Ireland.



Bishop Noel Treanor said -

Here in the diocese of Down and Connor we hear this Message through the burden of our history and the challenges of our history-laden present. Much has been done to consolidate justice and peace here in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement. And as the 2013 Haass negotiations have shown, much remains to be done.

On this World Day of Peace we owe it to ourselves as Christians and as fellow citizens to encourage our politicians to push forward and call all to reciprocal trust and respect, and not to be manipulated by negative forces of fear, tribal power-play or short-sighted protectionism of party political turf. Only by building and shaping trust will we create agreed space for all, a

space that will emerge one day in this society. And why not in our time and by our common civic, Christian and political will?

We owe it to ourselves to consolidate peace with justice in our time. We owe it to our children so that we can build a society where they can grow and flourish as persons with opportunities to live with all peoples as appreciated and respected neighbours and with opportunities for literacy, numeracy, work and employment. On the basis of what has been achieved here in recent decades, we owe also it to humanity to show that strife, hatred and enmity can be overcome and definitively replaced by agreed ways of living together in respect, peace and reciprocal support.

Among the concluding remarks of this 2014 World Peace Day Message the following lines deserve consideration by all Christians in Northern Ireland:

The necessary realism proper to politics and economy cannot be reduced to mere technical know-how bereft of ideals and unconcerned with the transcendent dimension of man. When this openness to God is lacking, every human activity is impoverished and persons are reduced to objects that can be exploited. Only when politics and the economy are open to moving within the wide space ensured by the One who loves each man and each woman, will they achieve an ordering based on a genuine spirit of fraternal charity and become effective instruments of integral human development and peace. (no. 10)

As Christians we all pray "Abba" Father (Gal 4. 6), as we are reminded by the second reading for today's liturgy of the Word. We are guardians, bearers and heralds of the Good News of God's plan of salvation, of the economy of salvation. This World Peace Day Message carries in its closing lines a call to all Christians and to all women and men of good will:

"This is the good news that demands from each one a step forward, a perennial exercise of empathy, of listening to the suffering and the hopes of others, even of those furthest away from me, and walking the demanding path of that love which knows how to give and spend itself freely for the good of all our brothers and sisters". (no.10)

May we and all Christian citizens of Northern Ireland work at realising this perennial exercise of empathy throughout 2014.