

**Letter of the Conference
of the Franciscan Family
on the occasion of Pentecost 2005**



**I NSTRUMENTS
O F P EACE**

Rome 2005

INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

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on the occasion of Pentecost 2005

Rome 2005

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Adapted for English usage

1. "May the Lord give you Peace!" With this greeting, left to us by St. Francis, we address all the sisters and brothers of the great Franciscan Family and all men and women whom God loves (*cf. Lk 2, 14*).

Our father St. Francis, in his Testament, confirmed for us that it was the Most High God who revealed to him this particular greeting: "The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: 'May the Lord give you peace'" (*Test 23*). Today, united and obedient to him, we also affirm it to all of you while we live in a world lacerated by many wars, terrorism, social injustice, hunger and natural catastrophes of almost apocalyptic proportions.

We offer this greeting above all to those men and women who openly, though often in a very false manner, live in situations of laceration in their own person, family, fraternity or community and work place. We recognize in the world and in present-day men and women the urgent need for peace in the broadest sense of the term, in its old sense of "Shalom" (*cf. Is 9,5s; 48,18.19; 54,13; Mi 5,1-4; Lv 26,6; Pr 12,20*): peace between peoples and countries, peace between different cultures and religions; peace which guarantees a dignified home and security, all that is needed to feed and clothe oneself, the respect and dignity of the person, harmony with the whole of creation, happiness of heart and with God, the giver of all life.

Our mission: to announce peace

2. Faithful to divine revelation wherever he went and every time he spoke to the people in a sermon (*cf. Mir 26; LegPer 67; 1Cel 23; 3Comp 26*), Francis and the early Franciscan Family announced this new greeting of peace, unknown up to then, in a world divided by big and small wars, adhering, through it, to the very greeting of the Risen Christ: "Peace be with you" (*cf. Lk 24,36; Jn 20,19.21.26*). But his desire for peace was often transformed into a real and proper initiative in favor of a concrete peace, as the extraordinary events of reconciliation between the Authorities and the Bishop of Assisi (*cf. LegPer 84*), of the pacification of the city of Arezzo and other cities (*cf. 2Cel 108; LFI 11*), of the visit of Francis to the Sultan (*cf. 1Cel 57*) and of the episode of Gubbio (*cf. LFI 21*) give testimony. The greeting of peace and the initiatives in favor of peace were an integral part of the self understanding, of the style of life and of the mission of the first Brothers and this led them to be recognized as a true peace movement, so much so that Thomas of Celano himself presented the early fraternity as a "Pacis legationem", a true message of peace (*cf. 1Cel 24*).

3. This mission in favor of peace, announced through this particular greeting, finds its very foundation in some constitutive elements of the life and spirituality of Francis, of his Brothers and Sisters. The mission of peace is born of a pacified heart, fruit of an experience of pardon, mercy and gratuitousness. Francis also based the fraternal character of his movement (*cf. LtMin*) on it and responded to it through the choice of a life of penance which, in the discipleship of Jesus Christ, is fully oriented towards the eschatological values of the Kingdom of God: justice and peace. These are

accepted each time as a gift from God, which causes peace of heart to be found (*cf. 1Cel 26*). It is a gift, that of peace, which was realized through Jesus Christ in the history of salvation and was incarnated in the reality of a world in need of redemption (*cf. Rnb 23,1-4*). It is through this, by contemplating the wonders which God does in creation and works through the Son, that Francis discovered the link between peace, salvation and the redemption of men and women, feeling that he was intimately united to creation and to the supreme goodness of God. Our present-day salutation of Pax et Bonum is based on this discovery.

Francis, in writing his Rule, gave origin to a style of life which, through concrete and everyday attitudes, was capable of promoting peace. Poverty and simplicity, which are born of unlimited confidence in God, lead whoever accepts this style of life not to wish to appropriate anything, neither places, or houses or even his own will (*cf. Rnb 7,13; Adm 2*). With their hands free to embrace and serve the lepers (*cf. Test 1-3*), it was not necessary for Francis and his Brothers to procure any instruments of defense or arms to defend what they possessed from others (*cf. 3Comp 35*). Free of all pretensions and from every claim, the first Franciscan generation did not see a rival, an enemy, in the other. In a disarming way they recognized everyone as a brother or sister in Jesus Christ.

Through work (*cf. Rnb 7,1-9*), through wishing to insert themselves among the poor and excluded (*cf. Rnb 9,2*), through the rejection of money (*Rnb 8,1-12*) which was a new and brutal form of capitalism of that time, Francis and his Brothers gave prophetic witness to the possibility of a different way to co-exist and of a civil and ecclesial society enlightened by the Gospel of Jesus.

This new gospel life also brought with it a new way to express oneself. The vocabulary of Francis stayed

clear of warlike expressions about the heroic undertakings of conquest of his time in order to introduce and propose once again, on the basis of the Bible, concepts such as that of not appropriating (*cf. Rnb 7,13*), of not judging (*cf. Rnb 11,1.10*), of behaving spiritually (*Rnb 16,5 ss.*) and others which promoted peace even through language. In this way his very style of life became a true and proper way of reconciliation with God, with neighbor, with oneself and with the whole of creation.

An itinerary for peace

4. A careful reading of our sources not only presents us the early movement of the "Minors" as a true and proper message of peace and reconciliation, but it allows us to identify some essential attitudes in order to carry out a process of peace and reconciliation even today in a situation made inflexible through discord and struggle (*cf. LFI 21*) by:

- maintaining God at the center of activity;
- proceeding always with strength and wisdom in communion;
- identifying the true causes of violence and calling them by their real name;
- promoting conversion and reconciliation of all parties;
- seeking to heal and restore relationships rather than resolving disputes;
- re-establishing justice as the basis of real peace;
- recognizing that all social relationships are asymmetrical and that every situation of conflict implies an imbalance and an evil use of power;
- remaining disarmed (*cf. Memoriale Propositi, 16*);

- rejecting the demonizing of one of the parties and recognizing all as brothers and sisters;
- facing up to conflicts actively, being exposed personally to danger and allowing oneself to become involved.

These attitudes present a real and proper path for promoting peace to us and require acting without arrogance or force. Such behavior is only possible, however, on the basis of unconditional confidence in God. Only by maintaining the Spirit and Authority of God at the center of one's activity, can the attempt at reconciliation and pacification have any hope of success. Accepting such a service in favor of peace is not without its dangers or difficulties. The Franciscan, therefore, does not walk alone, but in vital and mutual communion with the worldwide Fraternity and the Church, a communion which gives support and encouragement. Proceeding in unity, the Brothers and Sisters can and must recognize, with prophetic courage, the true causes of every form of violence and call them by name.

The violence cannot be hidden or minimized. Only by knowing how to recognize and by accepting to heal the evil, can a process which will lead to conversion and reconciliation of all the parties involved be initiated and, in the end, it must be sought to re-establish justice as the basis for constructing true peace, because only in this way can the mediations used to achieve reconciliation have a lasting future.

Purifying the memory

5. The memory of the beginnings of the Franciscan Family as a movement of penance and as a message of peace inevitably leads us to recognize humbly that our history has not always corresponded to that

vocation and that the Franciscans have not always given witness to the greeting of peace revealed to Francis through their life. Instead, ambiguities and the taking of sides in the face of unjust and violent situations have often been shown. We cannot deny that at different times they themselves were the cause or even the promoters of injustice and violence.

The recalling of this shadow in our history is necessary for a real and proper purification of our memory in view of an authentic gospel process. With our lamented Pope John Paul II we affirm that such a memory of failures "is very useful for correctly understanding and carrying out the authentic request for pardon, based on the *objective responsibility* which Christians share as members of the Mystical Body, and which spurs today's faithful to recognize, along with their own sins, the sins of yesterday's Christians, in the light of careful historical and theological discernment. Indeed, because of the bond which unites us to one another in the Mystical Body, all of us, though not personally responsible and without encroaching on the judgment of God who alone knows every heart, bear the burden of the errors and faults of those who have gone before us.

The recognition of past wrongs serves to "*reawaken our consciences to the compromises of the present, opening the way to conversion for everyone*" (Homily, *The Day of Pardon*, 12th March 2000). It is only by true conversion and faith in the Gospel (*Mk 1, 15*) that we can rediscover peace of heart and become true messengers of peace for our world. Conversion of heart is the possibility of not being won over by evil, but overcoming it through good (cf. John Paul II, *World Day for Peace Message*, 1st January 2005). Since, therefore, peace is a good to be promoted through good (*Op. Cit. 1*), the Franciscans should renounce every kind of violence in order to "*leave the vicious circle of evil for evil*" (*Op. Cit. 1*).

The difficult path of peace

6. After a "dark century" of fierce wars, brutal dictatorships, grave and unjust social disparity between north and south of the world and the cold war, the beginning of the new millennium was full of hope and even of enthusiasm for a more peaceful and more just time. But already the first years of this new century are showing us the fragility of the coexistence of humanity and new splits are being opened up which threaten world peace and the restructuring of a just equilibrium between nations. An almost apocalyptic catastrophe then showed us, through all its violence, that humanity has even lost its harmony with creation. Today we find ourselves faced by a series of problems which, in our global world, are all connected, in a certain sense, to the ecological: the extinction of some species, climatic changes and the pollution of the environment are often linked to grave social problems such as the heavy indebtedness of so many countries, which, in turn, are the cause of further problems such as poverty, hunger, unemployment and emigration.

There are, then, the structures of sin which trigger the spiral of violence. Among these is the institutional and military structure which often oppresses defenseless citizens, when it is not spurring them on to fling themselves against other peoples, creating innocent victims and often arousing, as a reaction, uncontrollable forms of terrorism. We then recall the various fundamentalisms, nationalisms and a new imperialism which are today at the origin of the collision between cultures and religions. In addition, there is international crime which, feeding on the drugs and arms trade, brings death to many corners of our world. The ruthless rules, finally, of a market which, in the name of freedom, subordinates the value of life to that of the economy, giving privilege to

a few and marginalizing many, often condemning the weakest in particular to a future without hope: women, children, the old and sick. At times it seems that the seeds of peace are really suffocated by the interests of political and economic power, by the structures of injustice and by personal sin.

What does peace mean, then, in this uncivilized and militarized world? What does peace mean in a world where a consumerist and accumulative system reigns? What does it mean to speak of peace for the men and women who live in a war zone? What does it mean to speak of peace for those who have lost everything?

In the Franciscan spirit, faced by all these situations, we cannot remain passive or merely moved to tears; we must feel that we are called to follow the footprints of Jesus Christ, who came "to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor" (*Lk 4, 18*).

Francis embraced the plan of God for creation, considering them a family of sisters and brothers (*cf. CantC*). He never called himself simply "Francis", but always "Brother Francis." Being a "brother" revealed the feeling that he was in relationship with every creature and that his mission was to heal the relationships with docile humility (*cf. CantC 10-11; 3Comp 14,58*). The activity for peace is linked to this proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel (*cf. Eph 6, 15*) and addressed to all irrespective of their social state or gender, of their race or religion. For the Church, remaining faithful to God, the promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the mission through which it continues the redemptive work of Christ on earth (*cf. The Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, n. 516*). As missionaries of the Gospel, and faithful to the Church, we wish to renew

our tradition of being messengers of gospel peace today.

Promoting good

7. Since peace begins to be lived as a profound value in the intimacy of each person in order to be then extended to our families, fraternities and communities until it involves all the ambiances in which we live, our personal reconciliation with God, ourselves, our brothers, sisters and all creation will be necessary in order to create a true and proper culture of peace (*cf. The Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, n. 495*). Even though this is a very personal and intimate moment, such reconciliation must also include our structures, our style of life, our work and our mission so that all may truly serve in the construction of peace, justice and love. Only through a credible conversion of our hearts, personal structures, style of life, way of planning, thinking and working, will we become fruitful workers for peace. Our commitment to peace then will require, in a particular way, proceeding with that fraternal spirit which characterizes in a special way our form of life and will not allow some brothers and sisters with a particular and prophetic vocation to become engaged on their own in favor of peace, justice and integrity of creation.

8. We propose, on the basis of this personal conversion, a vision of peace as the overcoming of personal and structural sin, the overcoming of suffering, pain, anger and of deep wounds through reconciliation. We, as witnesses to the Good News, wish to engage in our mission in the world in favor of this process of reconciliation, which requires us to

distinguish activity against evil, violence and injustice from activity in favor of peace and justice, excluding every form of violence in order to make real reconciliation possible. Our mission of peace cannot be based on an attitude characterized by being "against", but must be nourished by the constant search for the good in life.

This acting in favor of good includes the unmasking of the causes of evil and the courageous condemnation of every form of unjustified violence, because to speak about evil and injustice without unmasking the institutions, systems and sins responsible for injustice and evil would be more than hypocritical. Only when the causes of discord, wars, injustice and small and big human sins have been prophetically identified, will a profound recovery from all wounds be possible.

The path to reconciliation will be difficult without such a recovery. We Franciscans wish to achieve this recovery from wounds through fraternal and charitable dialogue, a respectful dialogue which knows how to appreciate every person, culture and religion by promoting the good, the beautiful and the true present in the other. We wish to initiate this dialogue in our own fraternities and communities, in our families, between our Franciscan Institutes, in the Church, between different cultures and religions, in the diverse countries where we are present, exposing ourselves to danger by assuming all the possible consequences and by participating in the mission and passion of Christ (*cf. Rnb 16, 10-11*). In a particular way we wish to initiate this dialogue in the places of conflict, tension, despair, intolerance and marginalization. Through our dialoguing we wish to give witness to that saving dialogue with humanity which God brings forth in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the service of love

9. We wish, on the basis of our rich tradition and through our disposition to dialogue, to re-found ourselves in the spirituality of pardon, mercy and gratitude in order to overcome, through that real peace which only Jesus Christ can give us (*cf. Jn 14,27*), the little wars of daily life and the big wars of the world; to re-found ourselves in the spirituality of fraternity and equality in order to overcome intolerance and the many forms of discrimination and marginalization through the law of love (*cf. Jn 15,9-17*); to re-found ourselves in the spirituality of simplicity in order to overcome consumerism and the many forms of abuse against life and creation through esteem and benevolence towards all forms of life.

In finding again the deep roots of our Franciscan vocation we will not only find peace in our own hearts, in our fraternities, communities and families, but we can also become fruitful workers for peace and reconciliation in this world.

Remembering our particular vocation as Franciscans to be messengers of peace in this world, let us encourage and stimulate the gift of being prophets of a new style of co-existence based on love and familiarity and, therefore, on non-violence, justice and the integral care of our mother earth (*cf CantC*); let us defend the right to life on all levels and the possibility of access to the essential resources for all; in a particular way we should suffer with and wish to be close to the innumerable victims of this world. On the basis of this prophetic dimension of our vocation we raise our voice in favor of disarmament on all levels (*cf. The Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, n. 508s*); we denounce the use of children and adolescents as soldiers in armed conflicts (*cf. op.cit. 512*) and every form of discrimination and exploitation

of women; we condemn every form of terrorism; we protest against every form of colonialism or military and economic imperialism; we reject fundamentalism and the tendency towards integralism; we struggle with pacific means against the structures and authors of every kind of slavery and suppression.

Finally, we beseech our father St. Francis and our mother St. Clare, the great promoters of peace and well-being, and Mary, Queen of Peace, to grant us the capacity to live in this world as faithful servants of the Spirit of Jesus, our peace (*Eph 2, 14*).

Rome, 15 May 2005
Solemnity of Pentecost

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Abbreviations:

Sacred Scripture

Eph	Ephesians
Is	Isaiah
Jn	John
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	Luke
Mi	Micah
Mk	Mark
Pr	Proverbs

Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life by Thomas of Celano
3Comp	Legend of the 3 companions
Adm	Admonitions
CantC	Canticle of Creatures
LegPer	Legend of Perugia
LFI	The Little Flowers of St. Francis
LtMin	Letter to a Minister
Mir	The Mirror of Perfection
Rnb	Unapproved Rule
Test	Testament of St. Francis

“ Our commitment to peace then will require, in a particular way, proceeding with that fraternal spirit which characterizes in a special way our form of life and will not allow some brothers and sisters with a particular and prophetic vocation to become engaged on their own in favor of peace, justice and integrity of creation.”

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