

Feast of Mary, Mother of God, 2012

Good morning. The full title of today's feast is: "The Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord: Mary, the Holy Mother of God." The octave day, the eighth day after birth, held great importance for Jewish people. And on that day children received their name and, in the case of a male child, the rite of circumcision. In fact, when I was a child, this holyday was even called the Feast of the Circumcision. There's also a tradition that goes back to the fifteenth century that calls this day the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.

It's apparent from its different titles that this feast contains many evocative themes, but there's also one that we're not so familiar with, and that's PEACE. It's not just that at this time of the year, we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. And it's not just that we honor in our feast today the one who is Mary, Queen of Peace. Ever since 1968, our international Church has also celebrated January 1st as World Day of Peace, and successive popes have issued a special message of peace to the whole world. (I'm just curious how many of you knew that... We don't take much notice of that in the U.S., for some reason.) For 45 years now, each of these individual peace letters has also had a special theme for the times. Five years ago the theme was *The Human Person, the Heart of Peace*. Three years ago it was *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*; then *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*. The reason I decided to bring this up to you today is because of this year's theme, which I think we should especially be able to relate to here at St. Bridget. The theme of this year's World Day of Peace is *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace*.

Young people! Ever since the mid-1980's -- for about the last 25 years -- one of the major focal points for St. Bridget has been our young people. It's not just that we support and educate them in our Catholic Schools -- Assumption-St. Bridget, the Villa Academy, our Catholic high schools -- but we offer programs, activities, and other opportunities for our young people to be active in our parish life. The reason I mention 25 years, is because we are the only parish in the Seattle area -- probably the only parish in the archdiocese -- to have continually had a paid youth minister on our parish staff for these past 25 years. That priority is an indication of how important our young people have been to us.

It is not an easy ministry, not the least because as our young people grow up, you have to be continually reinventing the program. We started with ministers from the Channel Program -- young people themselves, just fresh from college, who gave a year of their lives, or two or three, working for a beginner's salary and helping us here with our youth. But then, even after the Channel Program ended, we have continued to fund this ministry, and we've been very blessed to have had Joe Rinaldi here as our youth minister for the last 7 or 8 years. But above all, our youth ministry here has taken its biggest jump in these last three years, when in addition to having a youth minister on staff, we finally got a pastor who has really invested himself in personally reaching out to our youth.

So today, in line with the theme of *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace*, I would like to share a few lines from Pope Benedict's message. He writes to our youth, and to all of us.

He begins writing to everyone, and then writes to the young:

Peace...is not merely a gift to be received; it is ... a task to be undertaken. In order to be true peacemakers, we must educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, ... in being active within the community and concerned to raise awareness about national and international issues. Peace is not only about conflict resolution, but about cooperation for development, promotion of growth, and the seeking adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

To the young -- you who have such a strong attachment to ideals, I extend a particular invitation to be patient and persevering in seeking justice and peace, in cultivating the taste for what is just and true, even when it involves sacrifice and swimming against the tide....

My dear young people [and here is speaking to young adults, too], you are a precious gift for society. Do not yield to discouragement in the face of difficulties...Do not be afraid to make a commitment, to face hard work and sacrifice...Be confident in your youth and its profound desires for happiness, truth, beauty, and genuine love! Live fully this time in your life so rich and so full of enthusiasm.

Please realize that you yourselves are an example and an inspiration to your elders, even more so to the extent that you seek to overcome injustice...and strive to build a better future. Be aware of your potential; never become self-centered but work for a brighter future for all. You are never alone. The Church has confidence in you, follows you, encourages you, and wishes to offer you the most precious gift she has: the opportunity to raise your eyes to God, to encounter Jesus Christ, who is himself justice and peace.

And to all you men and women throughout the world -- take to heart the cause of peace. Peace is not a blessing already attained, but rather a goal to which each and all of us must aspire. Let us look with greater hope to the future; let us encourage one another on our journey; let us work together to give our world a more humane ... face; let us feel a common responsibility towards present and future generations, especially in the task of training them to be people of peace and builders of peace.

"With these thoughts I offer my reflections and I appeal to everyone: let us pool our spiritual, moral, and material resources for the great goal of 'educating young people in justice and peace.'" -- Pope Benedict XVI

I think it's only fitting to conclude this morning with words from our First Reading -- for all of us, but especially for our young people:

"May the Lord bless you and keep you!
.....May the Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!
.....May the Lord look upon you kindly, and give you PEACE!"

Denny Duffell, January 1, 2012