

Winter Solstice Prayers for Peace Program

- December 21, 2020 -

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Notes: *The 2020 Winter Solstice is actually at 5:02 am ET December 21st. In Dayton, sunrise is at 7:54 am. We are gathering live at 7:30 pm ET. You are invited to have ready a candle or fireplace or outdoor fire and some festive foods and beverages at the end. Begin the service in dark/minimal light.*

Call to Prayer -

Everything beyond a certain distance is dark, and yet everything is full of being around us. This is the darkness, heavy with promises and threats, which (we) will have to illuminate and animate with the divine presence - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Reader: Today we commemorate the longest night and shortest day of our year in the northern hemisphere and the return of the lengthening days. With the rising of the sun is the promise that light conquers darkness; that new life is obtainable and that death is overcome. Our ancestors, not knowing exactly when Jesus was born placed the Christmas feast at this time of solstice (formerly Dec 25th on the Julian calendar) to celebrate Jesus as the Light overcoming all darkness. People of many traditions light candles and decorate with festive lights in this season, as a reminder of the promise of God's light within us - a light that overcomes all darkness. Our Jewish brothers and sisters have just completed their Hanukkah celebration. On the evening of December 21st this year, Jupiter and Saturn in the night sky will be in a bright great conjunction – closer together than they've been in some 800 years. Some wonder if such a conjunction is what the magi followed in the year Christ was born. Today, we are reminded anew to trust the promise of light, to enkindle the flame of God's love within us and to pray that we might let go of anything that impedes us from living as peace-makers who overcome the deeds of darkness with light and love. The world needs our peace and care. Let us pray for courage to live in harmony with all the earth as peace-makers.

ALL: O radiant Dawn, Splendor of eternal light, sun of justice; Come shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

Sing: (Tune of O Come, O Come Emmanuel)

O come O Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by your drawing nigh.

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel.

Reader: Let us listen to Reflections from Pope Francis – World Day of Peace Message, released this week: *A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace. We'll respond singing verses of O Come O Come Emmanuel*

...I extend cordial greetings to all ...Organizations, spiritual leaders and followers of the different religions, and to men and women of good will. To all I offer my best wishes that the coming year will enable humanity to advance on the path of fraternity, justice and peace between individuals, communities, peoples and nations. ... 2020 was marked by the massive Covid-19 health crisis, which became a global phenomenon cutting across boundaries, aggravating deeply interrelated crises like

those of the climate, food, the economy and migration, and causing great suffering and hardship. I think especially of all those who lost family members or loved ones, and all who lost their jobs. I think too of physicians and nurses, pharmacists, researchers, volunteers, chaplains and the personnel of hospitals and healthcare centers. They have made, and are continuing to make, great sacrifices to be present to the sick, to alleviate their sufferings and to save their lives; indeed, many of them have died in the process....

Sad to say, alongside all these testimonies of love and solidarity, we have also seen a surge in various forms of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, and wars and conflicts that bring only death and destruction in their wake. These and other events that marked humanity's path this past year have taught us how important it is to care for one another and for creation in our efforts to build a more fraternal society. . . . A culture of care as a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time.

Let us pray for wisdom to guide our caring and peacemaking – (Sing)

O come O Wisdom from on high, who orders all things mightily.

To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel

God the Creator, the source of our human vocation to care In the Bible, the Book of Genesis shows . . . the importance of care or protection in God's plan for humanity. It highlights the relationship between (hu)man(ity) ('*adam*') and the earth ('*adamah*'), and among ourselves as brothers and sisters. ... God entrusts the garden "planted in Eden" to Adam's care, to "*till it and keep it*". This entails making the earth productive, while at the same time protecting it and preserving its capacity to support life. These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.

While confirming the inviolable dignity of the person created in God's image and likeness, this was also a sign of God's plan to preserve the harmony of his creation, since "peace and violence cannot dwell together". Care for creation was at the heart of the institution of the Sabbath, which, in addition to ordering divine worship, aimed at the restoration of the social order and concern for the poor.

The principles of the Church's social doctrine is the basis for a culture of care. (It) is ... offered to all people of good will as a ... "grammar" of care: commitment to promoting the dignity of each human person, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, the pursuit of the common good and concern for protection of creation.

Care and protection of creation The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* is fully aware that all creation is interconnected. It also highlights our need to listen to the cry of the poor and, at the same time, to the cry of creation. Constant and attentive listening leads in turn to effective care for the earth, our common home, and for our brothers and sisters in need... "a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be authentic if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings" Peace, justice and care for creation are... inherently connected.

Let us pray to have tender, compassionate hearts – (Sing)

O come, Desire of nations bind, In one the hearts of humankind.

O bid our sad divisions cease, And be for us our King of Peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel.

A compass pointing to a common path At a time dominated by a culture of waste, faced with growing inequalities both within and between nations, I urge government leaders and those of international organizations, business leaders, scientists, communicators and educators, to take up these principles as a “compass” capable of pointing out a *common direction* and ensuring “a more humane future” in the process of globalization. This will enable us to esteem the value and dignity of every person, to act together in solidarity for the common good, and to bring relief to those suffering from poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination. I ask everyone to take this compass in hand and to become a prophetic witness of the culture of care, working to overcome the many existing social inequalities. This can only come about through a widespread and meaningful involvement on the part of women, in the family and in every social, political and institutional sphere.

How many resources are spent on weaponry, especially nuclear weapon that could be used for more significant priorities such as ensuring the safety of individuals, the promotion of peace and integral human development, the fight against poverty, and the provision of health care. Global problems like the present Covid-19 pandemic and climate change have only made these challenges all the more evident. What a courageous decision it would be to “establish a ‘Global Fund’ with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, in order to permanently eliminate hunger and contribute to the development of the poorest countries”!

There can be no peace without a culture of care The culture of care thus calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance. As such, it represents a privileged path to peace. “In many parts of the world, there is a need for paths of peace to heal open wounds. There is also a need for peacemakers, men and women prepared to work boldly and creatively to initiate processes of healing and renewed encounter” As Christians, we should always look to Our Lady, Star of the Sea and Mother of Hope.

Let us pray to always nurture a culture of care - (Sing)

**O come O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
Who mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you O Israel**

PERIOD OF SILENCE - Let us reflect on the words of Pope Francis that spoke most to us, and be aware of the prayer, desires and concerns of your own heart.

As we gather to celebrate the first turning from winter into spring, we are invited to recognize and honor the beauty and renewal of hope in the often-unwanted season. Let us turn our hearts and souls to all who are feeling isolated, and alone and ravaged by poverty, hunger and homelessness in this more harsh winter season and allow us to open our arms to them in care. As the planet experiences the first slow turn toward greater daylight, we pray for transformation as peacemakers. Let us pray:

ALL: God, in the quiet darkness of this moment we search for the sacred light that shines on in our darkness. O Source of All Peace we have not always acted for peace. We have caused division and brokenness. We ask for your forgiveness & healing. Help us live out our calling as peacemakers. May our journey through darkness to light today help grow your courage & strength to change. To find the light we must go into the dark. Go with us into the dark places where we must travel.

Take away our fear of darkness. Be a lantern for us that we may be lanterns for one another. Help us find your way of Peace, Hope, Care and Light.

Sing (MEEC Annual Solstice Chant):

Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the darkness; Light our way, Light our way

1. Be our path of Peace 2. Be our path of Hope 3. Be our path of care.

Lighting the Winter Solstice Fire

Adapted from *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* by Edward Hays. Forest of Peace Books, Ave Maria Press, 2008

Leader: Let us light the sacred solstice fire, and pray for the courage to confront our fears.

(You are invited to light your candle or fireplace/additional lights candles)

ALL: We pray on this night of ancient fear. When those who have gone before us were fearful of what lurked outside the ring of fire of light and warmth. They feared all that prowled in the darkness: Evil, disease, death, beasts that might destroy them and the hidden dangers of winter.

Offering Peace and Prayers to the Four Directions

For each direction, you are invited to stand if you are able and to turn to face that direction – using arm gestures of receptivity to receive the gifts of that direction and of outreaching to offer prayer for the people and earth in that direction of the world. Response to each will be a verse of our Solstice chant.

Leader: Let us turn to face the East – the direction of the sunrise, of springtime. May each dawn remind us of the coming of Christ to our world. We pray in gratitude for the gift of children, of moments of joy and healing laughter and the surprise of new growth sprouting where we don't expect it. We reach out to extend peace to all people in the east – on the Atlantic coast and across to Europe, Asia and the Middle East. We prayerfully hold their concerns in our heart. Through this pandemic, may the promise of the new life of springtime sustain us as caring peace-makers.

**We sing: Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the Darkness
Light our way, Light our way, be our path of peace**

Leader: Let us turn to face the South – the direction of midday and of summer, the season that those in the southern hemisphere are welcoming today. We open our hearts to embrace the Divine Light of spiritual transformation. We pray in gratitude for youth and young adults and the new gifts their generation bring to our world, and give thanks for the moments outdoors we enjoyed in our past summer. We reach out to extend peace to all the people in the south of us in the US and all the Americas, Central and South and Antarctica, Africa and India. We pray for all those displaced by hurricanes and other disasters, and all the concerns of the global south and pray for the courage to address climate change. Through this pandemic, may the fullness of life, and time outdoors sustain and renew us as caring peacemakers.

**We sing: Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the Darkness
Light our way, Light our way, be our path of hope.**

Reader: Let us turn to face the West – the direction of evening, sunset and season of autumn. We open our hearts to receive the Divine Light that guides us in our times of farewell. We pray in gratitude for all adults - their leadership, service and all the work that continues life and prepares the next generation. And we give thanks for the harvest of food from the land that sustains our bodies. We reach out to extend peace across the plains and mountains of the west to the Pacific coast, and all Pacific Islanders and Island nations of Asia and hold their concerns and all those who are grieving in our prayer. Through this pandemic, we pray for the comfort of beauty and care to touch the places of loss in our hearts. We ask for the courage to let go of what impedes us.

**We sing: Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the Darkness
Light our way, Light our way, be our path of care.**

Reader: Let us courageously turn to face the North – the direction of night, and the new season of winter, the season of cold and barrenness we enter into. We open our hearts to receive the strength of the Divine Light to sustain us through the cold, stillness and barrenness. We pray in gratitude for our elders, wisdom figures and all who have gone before us who have taught us how to live in harmony and peace with the earth. We reach out to extend peace to all in the north from Canada to the North Pole all in the boreal forests and Arctic tundra and hold their concerns in prayer. We pray for all prisoners and refugees, the homeless sick and who are lonely, alienated and suffering through the COVID pandemic. We pray for patience and hope. And the grace to enter into winter's quiet beauty, of starlight, and simple moments with family and friends.

**We sing: Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the Darkness
Light our way, Light our way, be our path of peace.**

Note: The O Antiphons (found in each verse of O Come O Come Emmanuel are traditionally prayed in the week leading up to the Christmas celebration. These O Antiphons for winter provide a way to reflect on the gift of nature in winter and what it can teach us.

O Antiphons for Winter

By Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr

From: The Circle of Life. The Heart's Journey Through the Seasons, c. 2005, Sorin Books

O Frosty Season, Come! Come etch your face onto our windowpane. Light a candle in our hearts each morning. Reveal to us the beauty of waiting in the darkness. Keep vigil with us in this nurturing season. O Come!

O Season of the Sheltered Seed, Come! Come call us to be guardians of life. Smile through the darkness of long nights. Remind us that each seed needs a winter. Invite us to trust what is shrouded in mystery. O Come!

O Season of the Long Darkness, Come! Come with your misty grey cloak. Cast your dark robe over all that needs sleep. Surround us with faith in the unknown. Protect us from too much light. O Come!

O Wise Season of Reflection, Come! Come with your teachable moments. Summon our spiritual powers. Invoke our interior strength. Heal our reluctance to wait for spring. O Come!

O Season of Mystery and Contemplation, Come! Come into the fallow ground of our being. Allure us from doing into non-doing. Reveal to us the hidden wisdom in our souls. Restore what is out of balance in our lives. O Come!

O Season of Hidden Life, Come! Come teach us humility. Cut through the frozen ground of our being. Soften that which has become hard and unfeeling. Free all that resists the silent waiting. O Come!

Concluding Blessing:

Pope Francis exhorts us –

All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.

May we go forth, working together to advance towards a new horizon of love and peace, of fraternity as brothers and sisters, and solidarity, of mutual support and acceptance. May we never yield to the temptation to disregard others, especially those in greatest need, and to look the other way; instead, may we strive daily, in concrete and practical ways, “to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another’, now and forever, AMEN.

A Blessed and Happy, Safe and Peaceful Winter to All!

A Blessing of the Solstice Feast

From *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* by Edward Hays. Forest of Peace Books, Ave Maria Press, 2008

As our great star, the sun,
 Graciously shares light, warmth, and energy with us,
 May we, as children of the earth and the sun,
 Share with one another the life and joy of this meal.

We acknowledge that the food and drink before us
 Is sun-soaked and filled with star energy.

In this food and drink is the taste of the heavens;
 May we partake of it in peace
 With each other and with all the earth.

A winter solstice toast to the sun, and to the joys of the winter season.

Happy Winter!

The full document of Pope Francis’ Message for the celebration of the 54th World Day of Peace Message for January 1, 2021, with quote references can be found at:

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20201208_messaggio-54giornatamondiale-pace2021.html