

Peace Above All Else be with You and Your Family

The holidays are intended to be a time of great peace. Families and time spent together are to be prioritized over work and other obligations. But too often that is not the case today. Often the busyness of the season takes over what we want to do; what we feel we should be doing. Instead of enjoying baking cookies together, we stress over getting all of the holiday baking done in time. Instead of focusing on family togetherness, we struggle to figure out how we can get all of the work on our desk completed so that we can take the holidays “off”. We know that this is not how things ought to be, but find it difficult to escape the cycle of anxiety and stress.

We have so many anxieties in this time of international pandemic, as well as political and climate unrest. What is to be done? How are we to calm our minds and find peace? We are tempted to make up for the uncertainty of the times by making this the best Christmas ever for our children and loved ones despite our circumstances. Bring it all on; more decorations, more presents, more food; everything bigger and better than ever. This plan will not bring them peace and it won't bring you peace either.

On that most sacred night thousands of years ago there were no presents or decorations or even a meal worth mentioning, but Mary and Joseph were together with their beautiful baby and for that night anyway, they were safe. They and those the angels invited to the honoured event were blessed. It was beautiful in the simplest of ways and it was enough.

So prepare your hearts to celebrate that most Blessed event. Keep the traditions that bring you joy but don't let all the “extras” of the season rob you of the incredible peace that God offers us at this time. If a manger in a stable so far from home was all the holy family needed to celebrate the birth of our saviour, then what more can we ask for today. (Ok, the choir of angels would be pretty cool, but I digress) **Love your family, remember your neighbour, and find peace in this beautiful season.** When the craziness of the holidays starts to overwhelm you stop. Pray. Meditate. Blast out your favourite Christmas carols. And let the Lord bless you with peace and understanding.

Children's Challenge:

Help Mom and Dad with their Christmas preparations in a spirit of peace and joy.

Prayer for the Week:

Lord, in this holy season of prayer and song and laughter, we praise you for the great wonders you have sent us: for shining star and angel's song, for infant's cry in lowly manger. We praise you for the Word made flesh in a little Child. We behold his glory, and are bathed in its radiance.

Be with us as we sing the ironies of Christmas, the incomprehensible comprehended, the poetry made hard fact, the helpless Babe who cracks the world asunder. We kneel before you shepherds, innkeepers, wisemen. Help us to rise bigger than we are. Amen.

<https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=345>

Readings:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. John 14:27

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 5:1

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all." 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Songs of the Week: Silent Night, Let There be Peace on Earth, I heard the Bells on Christmas Day, Hallelujah (Light Has Come), O Holy Night

Video Lectures:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQW1VNUnXVk> The Divine Plan for Peace, Bishop Robert Barron (14 min) (PS I feel exactly the same way about mountains.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1iG49aYr5k> The Christmas Story according to Luke beautifully read by Vatican official Philip Witmore (3 min)

I hope that you have, but, in the event that you haven't yet, please consider checking out Brother Francis Days of Advent program on Formed for your children to enjoy. You may obtain a membership through FFI. (<https://famfi.ca/>) FFI has outstanding resources for the whole family.

Defenders of Peace

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/nuns-guns-and-the-wild-west-the-extraordinary-tale-of-sr-blandina-18321> Sr Blandina was an ordinary woman who did extraordinary things. The first part of the article tells of her acquaintance with the notorious Billy the Kid which is fun, but it is not the part that truly strikes me about this exceptional woman. She did a number of amazing things, she helped found the public health care system as well as public education and advocated for the beatification of two saints. The reason I included her in our study today though, is because of the events of an evening detailed near the end of the article. Read the article and see what this incredible person did when she came face to face with a lynch mob. AMAZING!

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-oscar-arnulfo-romero>

St Oscar Romero was a courageous man who appealed for physical peace right up to the moment of his martyrdom. He must have known that by spreading God's message he was signing his own death warrant, but he spoke out anyway, advocating for peace for everyone in his country. I am humbled by his courageous actions.

Object Lesson for the Little Ones- Peace in Turmoil

Materials

Use three balloons

Activity

Begin with a deflated balloon in your hand. Tell the group you're going to use it to help them understand peace. Inflate the balloon about half full. Sometimes troubles come into life and the tension builds as we give over a portion of our time, energy, and thought to deal with the situation. One way to deal with tense situations is to pray and trust God to work things out. Trusting God frees us for other things and we are back at peace again. But when we spend all our time and energy concentrating on difficulties things can get more and more tense. Inflate the balloon fully and hold it in front of you. When we concentrate on the difficulties, our lives become more and more crowded and tense, until we finally burst (pop the balloon). Ask the kids for examples of things people become worried about.

Next, take a second balloon and inflate it less than half full. Hold it out in front of you and poke it with your finger, allowing the surface of the balloon to contract and expand. Explain that when we trust God we're more flexible and less sensitive to other pressures. Inflate the balloon fully and tell the kids that a life filled with pointless worry makes us less able to deal with other pressures that come our way, and can cause even small problems to explode emotionally (For added emphasis, make sure you take your time inflating the balloon and popping it.) Ask the kids for examples of times when they or someone they know overreacted to some small irritation or pressure because they were already worried about something.

Finally, take a third balloon and tell the kids that some things happen in life that cause us a great deal of concern such as someone who is leaving for a long time, the death of a friend, or a divorce in the family. Explain that often during such times people are full of fear or anger or confusion. Inflate the balloon and ask the kids what they can do in a situation like that. Tell them that God has something to say about that situation, and about all the times when they're tempted to worry.

Application

Read or quote John 16:33. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have

peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
Assure them that God will help them deal with their worries and concerns and will give them his peace. Let the balloon go so that it flies round the room until it’s deflated.

<http://www.creativeyouthideas.com/resources/childrens-sermon/peace-in-the-turmoil/#ixzz6e0k7EIsK>



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