



Peace Sunday 2024

‘Artificial Intelligence and Peace’

Promoted by Pax Christi
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International Affairs Department,
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The 57th World Day for Peace will be observed in England & Wales on **Sunday 14 January, 2024**, the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B).

The readings for the Sunday Eucharist are 1 Samuel 3.3-10, 19; Psalm 40 (39).2, 4, 7-10; 1 Cor 6.13-15, 17-20; Jn 1.35-42.

Introduction to the Liturgy

The Bishops of England and Wales invite us to make today a day of prayer for world peace, using the theme proposed by Pope Francis: **‘Artificial Intelligence & Peace’**. It might seem a strangely technical, rather abstract title, of limited interest except to experts. But new technologies are developing so quickly that we need to think about their consequences for our freedom, peace and security. Who is gaining power through AI - and who is being disempowered? We also need to think of the risk of Artificial Intelligence, which will only have as much soul and ethical vision as those who programme it, calling the shots on the battlefield, deciding who lives and who dies - and possibly one day even triggering wars automatically.

Today’s Scriptures put us in touch with what makes us most fully human, what distinguishes us from machines - identity, belonging and calling. God calls Samuel by name and he has to learn how to reply. Our individual uniqueness always belongs within a larger identity, that of the Body of Christ (as St Paul reminds us). And to each of us, Jesus extends the invitation ‘Come and see’. Let us ask him to guide us through the ‘Brave New World’ which we have created and to forgive us for the ways in which we fail to live out our calling.

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world:

Lord have mercy.

Christ Jesus, on whom the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Peace, descended at your baptism:

Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus, proclaimed by John the Baptist as the Chosen One of God:

Lord, have mercy.

Introduction to the Readings

First Reading (1 Samuel 3. 3-10, 19)

The story of the boy Samuel in the Temple is many things - the story of a child growing in self-awareness; of a boy learning to pray, guided by the old priest, Eli; of Samuel's discovery of a sense of calling; above all, the story of a God of love who speaks with a living voice, heart-to-heart. Nothing can ever substitute for this person-to-person encounter in our human story.

Second Reading (1 Cor 6. 13-15, 17-20)

St Paul's insistence on purity is not just about abstinence from casual sex. It is far more fundamentally about recognising what it means to be human - 'the temple of the Holy Spirit', the dwelling place of God. We should let neither the pursuit of pleasure nor the values of a society increasingly in thrall to technology undermine the dignity and value of each human person.

Gospel (John 1.35-42)

You can ask ChatGPT: 'What do you want?' or 'Where do you live?' and it will no doubt give you a fairly plausible answer, based on its initial programming and subsequent interactions. But it can never know the answers to these questions and it can never reveal itself to us - because there is no self. In the Gospel, in contrast, we meet a real person, Jesus Christ, who speaks to our hearts. Only in that dialogue will we find the answers we seek and the invitation to be changed to the core of our being.

Homily Notes

This homily wasn't created by ChatGPT, I assure you. But why do I need to tell you this? And, anyway, how do you know that I'm telling the truth? My attempt to reassure you and the questions which follow from that simple statement take us to the heart of the issues raised by the development of Artificial Intelligence. The very nature of our humanity is called into question, together with the distinction between truth and falsehood.

You can see why Pope Francis has given us, as a theme for this *Peace Sunday* the rather abstract-sounding theme of '*Artificial Intelligence and Peace*'. Once we are no longer certain about the boundary between human thought and machine-generated speech, the question of what it means to say that each of us was created in God's image and likeness risks becoming unanswerable. And once we reach that point, how can we defend human dignity, human rights, human uniqueness?

Again, once the boundaries between truth and falsehood become so blurred that each of us can claim to have 'my truth' and can dispense ourselves from the need to listen to 'your truth', as though true and false were just matters of taste, on what basis can we pursue the Common Good - that value so key to Catholic understandings of Social Ethics? How do you create a world at peace when shouting our opinions louder than everyone else is deemed an appropriate way of establishing what is right and just?

Let's go back to my original assurance that this homily didn't come out of a machine-learning programme. Why would you believe my assertion? Because you know me and you trust me, perhaps; because you recognise the sound of my voice or, perhaps more importantly (especially if we've not met before), because you recognise the Gospel message, something which is resonant

of the Christian Tradition and Christian spirituality and sheer goodness, in what I have to say. Fundamentally, it is relationship which reassures you that it's me, not a computer, who is speaking.

Relationship is at the heart of our Scriptures today. We listen in on the spiritual awakening of Samuel in the Temple in our first reading. He is called by his name, spoken to in his personhood. His dignity and vocation are awakened and it is the task of the older generation, represented by the priest, Eli, to help him to understand who he is and who he is called to be and what it means to be a servant of the living God.

It's easy in our culture to hear Paul's call to purity as an exercise in prudishness, with the Apostle as kill-joy, denying people their fun. But actually he's inviting them, once again, to embrace their dignity. He's asking us at what level we wish to live. Stuff, images, cheap tricks, highs - these are never going to help us to live well in God's world. They are certainly never going to empower us to engage with the needs of our broken world in any mature way, because they are mere distractions, evasions of responsibility, compensations for life's disappointments. 'But you are the Temple of the Holy Spirit!' insists St Paul. AI is no substitute for real relationships, real love, real life. 'That is why you should use your body' - by which Paul means your whole self - 'for the glory of God'.

And then we come to one of the great encounters in all literature, the meeting of Jesus with those two disciples of John the Baptist, who set off after him, perhaps without even knowing why they did so. 'What are you looking for?' he asks. 'Where do you live?' they stammer in reply. And so the story begins, a story which includes their recognition of him, not only as Teacher but as Messiah, a story in which they find their true identity in listening to his voice. 'You are Cephas - meaning rock,' Jesus tells Simon. He wants to speak to our hearts, too. He wants to tell us who we really are and who we are really called to be. He wants to enter into dialogue with us - not like some AI chatbot at a call-centre but as a living, loving Lord, speaking heart-to-heart with his brothers and sisters. There's nothing fake here.

'Where do you live?' 'Come and see'. Where will he lead us? To the margins. To the broken places of our world. To the victims of war and the victims of fake news. To those who are lost and those who have never been asked, 'What are you looking for?' A living voice, a voice that speaks of peace, wants to speak through our words and actions, bringing truth to our politics, wisdom to our conversations, healing to our Common Home, hope to our world. And that voice has nothing to do with the copycat intelligence of a Chatbot.

Additional Resources

For additional Peace Sunday resources, including notes for an alternative homily, please see our website paxchristi.org.uk/peace-sunday/

Prayers of the Faithful

You may wish to include one or more of the following intercessions.

Priest: It is Christ who is our peace and who calls us to follow him as peacemakers in our violent and broken world. Let us pray for ourselves and for the world in which we are his witnesses. The response to each intercession is: **Christ, be our light.**

For our own homes, our families, our parish community; that the peace of Christ will work in and through us. For the relief of those who are victims of war and violence. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

For all Christians, that we will recognise our calling as peacemakers, using our God-given talents to build a culture of peace. For the ministry of Pope Francis, that he may continue his bold proclamation of the gospel of justice, peace and reconciliation. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

For our political leaders, that they will not provoke division and hatred but pursue a shared understanding, reconciliation and healing. And for our nation, that we may lead the world in laying down arms and in working to achieve a just peace. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

For a rejection of violence as a solution to human conflict. We pray especially for an end to wars and violent conflicts across the world, those we are aware of in Israel and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia and the many that are forgotten but still persist. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

For all involved in the development of artificial intelligence, that all technology will be advanced to serve the common good and not used for evil, the dehumanising of individuals or the destruction of creation. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

On this Peace Sunday, we pray for all who work, locally and internationally, for peace and justice; for all who will not be silent in the face of injustice or suffering; for all who take risks for peace. We ask God's blessing today especially on the work of the international Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

Let us commend to God's mercy all who are unwell (especially.....) that they might be restored to health; and all who have died (especially.....). May they dwell for eternity in the light of God's face. Let us pray to the Lord: **Christ, be our light.**

In a moment of silence, let us place before the Lord our own hunger and thirst for peace.

Final Prayer: Father, as the Spirit descended like a dove on your Son at his baptism, so grant that the same Dove of Peace may open up paths to a just peace for all in our world today. To you we make these our prayers, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen