

## THE TABLE OF PEACE

### THE HOMILY FOR THE FINAL EUCHARIST OF THIS CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC PEACE BUILDING

We, people for whom English is a second language, had to start by learning some of the easiest words such as, “table”, and very simple phrases like “the table has four legs”.

Maybe you are thinking that not all tables have four legs. That’s right. However, the four legged table is the only one to offer us full security. The three, two or one legged table often causes us to spill a portion of our coffee.

Let me say to you that peace, just as the secure table, also has four legs and I would like to call your attention to these four supports.

**The first leg is prayer.** That is why we are celebrating this Eucharist as the highest moment of this Conference which has been sponsored by the Catholic Peace Building Network at the University of Notre Dame.

Peace is a gift, but it is our duty to pray for this gift. We ask God to move all of our hearts toward reconciliation, forgiveness, and solidarity. That the Holy Spirit may bestow upon us this special grace, called peace.

We can perceive the presence of the Holy Spirit, acting as the Lord, The Giver of Life, as we proclaim in the Nicene Creed. Where can we see the winds of the Holy Spirit blowing today? We can look for signs of the positive action of the Holy Spirit in precisely those situations of violence due to the oppressive, alienating inequalities that are often based on class, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, and technology.

**The second leg is truth.** Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?”, but he was not really interested in the answer. We, instead, are in need of the answer, because without truth, there can be no peace.

Truth is that existential desire of the victims, of their families and of the whole society for knowing what happened, why it happened, and by whom it was caused to happen.

To this existential and simple meaning of truth, I want to add another, the one offered in the New Testament by the Greek word “Aletheia”. Aletheia translates truth as those events that neither can be forgotten nor hidden.

But the problem is not only to tell or not to tell the truth. It is also to whom to tell the truth, when, how, and with what purpose.

Therefore, the critical question, once we have the truth is: What are we going to do with it? Will it be used to foster a culture of peace and reconciliation, or will it be a packet of information useful only for finding a further motive for vengeance, or maybe just some interesting material for historical accounts?

Pope Benedict offered us his annual message: “In truth, peace”. After experiences like those of the past century, when aberrant ideological and political systems willfully twisted the truth and brought about exploitation and murder, we learn that any authentic search for peace must begin with the realization that the problem of truth and untruth is the concern of every man and woman; it is decisive for the peaceful future of our planet.

**The third leg is justice.** In one of his messages, Pope John Paul II made the connection between peace and justice by saying: “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.”

This message is not exclusive to the Pope. Many prophets called for justice in order to have peace. For example, Amos has a famous and magnificent request: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.” (Amos 5, 24).

In Amos’s request, the word justice has a double meaning: *Mispat* is justice applied by a judge according to the fullest extent of the law. *Sedaqa*, on the other hand, is justice applied by the righteous which is justice filled with mercy. This is the justice which generates peace.

If we want justice and nothing but justice we will inevitably get injustice, not peace. This experience has led to the formulation of the saying: “Summum ius, summa injuria”, *the sum of justice is injustice*.

If we want true justice we must let that justice be embedded in mercy. This leads us directly to the last leg of our table which is called peace.

**The fourth leg of peace** is love or charity, as John Paul II says in “Dives et Misericordia” (12): “The experiences of the past and those of our own time

demonstrate that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself, if that deeper power, which is love, is not allowed to shape human life in its various dimensions.”

That is why the compendium of the social doctrine of the church says:  
“True and lasting peace is more a matter of love than of justice, because the function of justice is merely to do away with obstacles to peace: the injury done or the damage caused. Peace itself, however, is an act that only results from love”. (494)

Now, let us return to the safety of our coffee which requires the sturdy four legged table. Let us keep alive in our hearts, in our families, and in our various countries these four supports of peace: prayer, truth, justice, and love.

These supports, these four legs, have been the special themes of our encounter this week. Let us place them on the altar. May the Spirit that marvelously transforms the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary, also, transform all of us into instruments of peace, and into prophets of prayer, truth, justice, and love.

We ask of the Lord, His gift of peace for the benefit of the life and dignity of every human being on earth. We ask this for the glory and honor He deserves, now and forever, amen.