



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2017
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Best wishes...

At Christmas and New Year's, we enjoy sharing our very best wishes with those we love. Along with "Merry Christmas!" and "Happy New Year!", one of the greetings we so often hear and repeat is "I wish you good health! It's so important!" Without denying the importance of good health, I would like to journey with you to discover the source of the Word of God, that which is truly most essential for the human heart.

We have all heard the Hebrew word *shalom* and know it is most often translated as "peace". What we may not always realize, however, is that *shalom* does not merely mean peace in the sense of the absence of war. There is in this word a richness with greater implications. Let me illustrate what I mean with an example. In 2 Samuel 11:7 (New Revised Standard Version), we read: "*When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going.*" If one sticks to the literal translation of this passage, David is asking Uriah about the *shalom* of General Joab, his army, and thus of the war; in short, about the "*shalom* (peace) of the war". Now that provides food for thought!

So let's dig deeper and explore the word *shalom* in order to appreciate its wealth of meaning better. In the passage just cited, if *shalom* means the "state", "situation", or even "evolution" of the battle, this term, throughout the rest of the Bible, can also indicate what is right and complete, and even evoke the fullness of existence replete with life, repose, and blessing. Moreover, *Shalom* denotes the well-being of day-to-day life marked by the harmony and serenity of human persons with themselves, with nature, with one another, and with God. Thus, it is a notion with a plurality of meanings which refer as much to each person's peace of heart as it does to peace-harmony-communion in families and societies, as well as among nations. One could say that *shalom*-peace is the only reality capable of truly fulfilling the human heart.

At the same time, the Word of God leads us even further. It teaches us that *shalom* is a gift from God, the Father of mercies, revealed in the person of Christ. The prophet Isaiah actually proclaims the Messiah as the "Prince of Peace" (9:5). Indeed, Jesus gives peace to us his disciples when he breathes his Holy Spirit on us. The night of Passover, "*Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'... he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit...'*" (John 20:19, 22). Our journey has led us to consider how in the world of the Bible the expressions "to be in good health" and "to be in *shalom*-peace" are practically identical.

What's more, the Gospel urges us to look around ourselves and ask whether *shalom*-peace is not also that reality that truly responds to the aspiration of all human beings. A quick glance at news media today is more than enough to convince us that our world and Canadian society are living their share of suffering, division, harrowing crises, and even wars. We desperately lack *shalom*-peace. What could we do better than to wish our world *shalom*-peace!

Furthermore, during this festive season of Christmas and New Year's, couldn't our "best wishes" – as much for the whole world as for our loved ones – be what the Lord wishes us? "*Peace be with you!*" (John 20:19)! At Christmas, let us unite our voices with the angels to sing "Peace on earth!" and on New Year's Day, the World Day of Peace, let us join our prayers to those of all our brothers and sisters to plead for *shalom*-peace for all humanity.

Above all, let us not forget that a wish is a commitment. To wish someone *shalom*-peace is to commit oneself to becoming *shalom*-peacemakers in our own communities!

Peace be with you!

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