

Tournay, 30th august 2013.

To all of you who seek for peace,

PEACE !

The Assembly of the United Nations established in 1982 a "International Day of Peace", to be held on the 21st September as decided in 2002. With this initiative, the United Nations give the world an opportunity to stop and think about solutions to break the infernal cycle of violence and war. Warriors from all over the world are encouraged to make a truce and drop their weapons, for that one day at least.

The theme chosen for 2013 is "Educating for peace", in order to think about the role of this education in the making of citizens of the world. According to Ban Ki-moon, General Secretary of the UN, "it is not enough to teach children how to read, write and count ; we also have to teach them how to respect each-other and how to respect the world that we live in, thus acting in favor of societies that would be more just, more open and more harmonious." In his letter of the 13th June 2013 presenting the proposition for an International Day of Peace 2013, Ban Ki-moon explains which type of education is at the heart of his initiative "Educating for peace", initiative that he recommends the United-States to consider as a top priority. He advises all - governments, parties in opposition, religious institutions, local governors, medias, universities or groups from the civil society - to accept and support his proposition. "We must elaborate programs of education for peace, protect students and professors who experience conflict situations, rebuild the schools that were destroyed by the war, and give girls and boys a high-quality education that will teach them to solve and to prevent conflicts", he adds. Ki-moon concludes his message exhorting governments and citizens not to spare their efforts, "in order to learn together how to promote a culture of universal peace".

Educating for peace is a big challenge for all of us. Firstly, for the society that teach us violence under the most refined of ways: the songs that we sing, the jokes that we repeat, the way that we punish our children, the games to which we play or that we watch, the medias, the names of the streets, the amount of money invested in providing arms, all the ways that are used to glorify violence. Secondly, educating for peace is a challenge for school in itself which, even if it is no more a tribune for violence or its rationalization, is not yet an agent of peace! We need to imagine a school that will teach us, beyond the Bhaskara formula and the periodic table, how to deal with conflicts without violence, how to canalize our aggressivity with constructive actions, how to demolish prejudices and stereotypes ; finally, a school that will encourage memories of peace to the entire educative community and that considers non-violence as one of its pedagogic goals. Eventually, educating for peace is a challenge for every inhabitant on earth : the greatest violences are legitimated by our little daily violences! In the same way, the biggest gestures of peace are anchored in our domestic actions in favor of peace!

In order to make of this International Day of Peace 2013 a leading event for countries and citizens, let us pray thus :

O Lord, educator of peace, You who guide your sons and daughters, lead them from the paths of violence to those of peace. Give them the grace to celebrate well the International Day of Peace this year. May those who fight drop their weapons for that one day at least. And may those who do not take them drop the violence from their hearts and unite their efforts, so that an education for peace may be given to children and youth. And may all of these days be days of peace for all the inhabitants of the world! We ask in the name of Him who is our peace (Ep 2, 14), the Christ, your Son and our Lord!

Best wishes,

Brother Irénée Rezende Guimarães

Benedictan monk from Notre Dame Abbey, Tournay, France