

New Year's Greetings: After having celebrated the Feast of Christmas with great joy and enthusiasm, we are at the dawn of the New Year 2017. Hoping that all the days in the New Year are going to be the days of God's abundant blessings and graces, let us raise our minds and hearts to God by invoking the intercession of the Mother of God and St. Francis Xavier, our Archdiocesan Patron, and by praying to Him for inspiration and guidance during this year. Let us also join our brothers and sisters who desire peace, joy and love to build a human family of mercy and forgiveness.

May all of us welcome the New Year with Christian hope and great optimism. It is also an opportunity for me to thank all of you for your cooperation and support extended to me in the past year and now to request you to extend it during the coming year.

World Day of Peace: January 1st is observed all over the world as the World Day of Peace.

'Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace' is the title of the message for the 50th World Day of Peace, and the fourth of Pope Francis. Violence and peace are at the origin of two opposite ways to building society.

The proliferation of hotbeds of violence produces most serious negative social consequences. The Holy Father sums up this situation in the expression: "A Third World War in Pieces". Peace, by contrast, promotes social positive consequences and it allows the achievement of real progress. Therefore, we should act within what is possible, and negotiate ways of peace even where they seem tortuous and impractical. Thus, nonviolence can acquire a more comprehensive and new meaning. It will not only consist of desire, of moral rejection of violence, barriers, destructive impulses, but also of a realistic political method that gives rise to hope. Such a political method is based on the primacy of law. If the rights and the equal dignity of every person are safeguarded without any discrimination and distinction, then nonviolence, understood as a political method, can constitute a realistic way to overcome arm conflicts. In this perspective, it becomes important to increasingly recognize not the right of force but the force of right.

Unity Octave: Every year, the World Council of Churches organizes the Unity Octave to pray for Christian Unity by selecting a specific theme. The theme selected for this year is: *Called to Proclaim the Mighty Acts of the Lord (1 Peter 2:9)*. The love of Christ compels us to become ambassadors who have been reconciled with God and others through professing faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's love becomes the driving force that moves us beyond our division towards act of reconciliation. Through psalms and songs we gather in Jesus' name in praise of God's wondrous deeds. We confess our sins of division and make our plea for

forgiveness. The proclamation of the word highlights the reconciling action of Christ as 'one who dies for all'. The faithful respond to this good news by accepting the call to be ministers of reconciliation

As usual, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will take place from 18 to 25 January 2017. Prayer for unity is the royal door of ecumenism: it leads Christians to look at the Kingdom of God and the unity of the Church in a fresh way; it deepens their bonds of communion; and it enables them to courageously face painful memories, social burdens and human weakness.

We rejoice in God's salvation centred on the cross of Christ who overcomes division and draws us together. This worship openly confesses and asks forgiveness for the sins of division which followed the reformation. The service will celebrate Christ and his act of reconciliation, which moves the hearts of divided Christians to become ambassadors for Christ as ministers of reconciliation.

Republic Day of India: We will be celebrating the 68th Republic Day on 26th of January. The First Republic Day of India was celebrated in 1950. India got freedom from the British Rule on 15th of August in the year 1947. At that time, there was no any permanent constitution of the country. First time, the first draft of the Indian Constitution was presented by the drafting committee to the national assembly on 4th November 1947. The first draft of the Indian Constitution was signed by the national assembly in both versions (Hindi and English) on 24th of January in the year 1950, and it came into effect on 26th of January in 1950. Since then, the Republic Day in India is celebrated on the 26th of January.

Let us on this day pray for our national leaders and fellow citizens that all of us may be more responsible in building the Nation by promoting true patriotism, unity and solidarity.

Reflection: There once was a very wealthy and curious king. This king had a huge boulder placed in the middle of a road. Then he hid nearby to see if anyone would try to remove the gigantic rock from the road.

The first people to pass by were some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers. Rather than moving it, they simply walked around it. A few loudly blamed the King for not maintaining the roads. Not one of them tried to move the boulder.

Finally, a peasant came along. His arms were full of vegetables. When he got near the boulder, rather than simply walking around it as the others had, the peasant put down his load and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. It took a lot of effort but he finally succeeded.

The peasant gathered up his load and was ready to go on his way when he saw a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The peasant opened the purse. The purse was stuffed full of gold coins and a note from the king. The king's note said the purse's gold was a reward for moving the boulder from the road.

The king showed the peasant what many of us never understand: every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition. The human condition is difficult and weakening. The way we chose to act when problems arise is what sets us apart from the rest. Those who are brave enough to face problems head on are rewarded in the end, despite all of their troubles. We have observed that life presents both obstacles and opportunities. It is unrealistic to presume we will have either without the other. Every opportunity presents an obstacle; every obstacle presents an opportunity. *The bigger the opportunity, the greater the obstacles!* The greater the obstacle, the bigger the opportunities will be.

We also learn a lot about our own character when we experience obstacles. And in every obstacle, God offers an opportunity to learn about His character as well.

“This is the day of the Lord's victory. Let us be happy. Let us celebrate” (*Psalm 118:24*). Any day is a good day when we are offered the opportunity to walk and live in His victory.

Let us make use of the obstacles and the opportunities that come on our way during this Year so that we may build inner strength to build self-confidence and to succeed in life.

May I once again wish all of you a very happy and grace-filled New Year 2017, and invoke God's abundant blessings upon you and your families all through this year.

+ Bernard Moras
Archbishop of Bangalore