

Sermon for the Week of Prayer for Peace in Korea (NCCK)

Those Who Love and Desire Peace, Draw near to God.

by Metropolitan Ambrosios of Korea

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (2 John 1:3)

On the issue of peace, which is of utmost importance, as well as the ultimate end of the war on the Korean Peninsula, which, sadly, has afflicted us for seven whole decades, on this issue we all understand that we can do nothing on our own, and we are in need of the dynamic intervention of God, as He Himself has assured us: *for without Me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5) We shall receive the help of God only if we dedicate ourselves with unshakeable faith to much fervent prayer.

I find the verse from the Psalms that has been put forth for reflection by the organizing committee, *seek peace and pursue it* (34:14), to be very fitting and helpful for the necessary spiritual contemplation during this week dedicated to prayer.

The reunification and reconciliation between North and South Korea can happen in reality only if we have this Psalm as our basis: *seek peace and pursue it.*

However, the question that arises is, of *which* peace does the word of God speak to us? The great theologian of the one and undivided Christian Church of the 4th century, St. Basil the Great, interprets this verse of the Psalm and writes: “Regarding peace, the Lord said, *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.* (John 14:27) Seek therefore after the peace of the Lord and pursue it. In no other way will you seek it than by running with the aim to receive

the prize of the high calling. (Phil. 3:14) For, true peace is found in heaven. As long as we are bound to the flesh, we are also bound to many things which greatly trouble us... therefore, acquire a peaceful mind... so that you may acquire the *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [and] will guard your hearts and minds.* (Phil. 4:7) He who seeks after peace, earnestly seeks after Christ, because He Himself is Peace, who has united the two into one new man (Eph. 2:15), bringing peace *and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*” (Col. 1:20)

The greatest ecclesiastical orator of all time, St. John Chrysostom, only a few decades after St. Basil, says further: “*Seek peace and pursue it.* I do not mean to say peace with man only, but also with God. The Psalmist said to pursue well, because many have driven away and rejected peace, and it has therefore left the earth and traveled to heaven. We should be able however to bring back peace to the earth if we should so desire it, and this we shall achieve if we set aside all that prevents it, namely foolishness and arrogance.”

Among the many and important teachings on peace by St. John Chrysostom, he also says the following: “*So great a good is peace, that the makers and producers of it are called the sons of God.* (Matt. 5:9) And for good reason, since the Son of God for this reason came upon the earth, to set at peace men on the earth, and the angels in the heavens. But, if the peacemakers are called the sons of God, the makers of divisions and quarreling are called sons of the devil... For this reason, when the desire to war against your brother comes to you, you would do well to remember that you war against the members of Christ and to stop your wild rage.”

Therefore, we understand that nothing is comparable to the great good that is peace, because nothing is its equal. St. Gregory the Theologian (4thcent.) notes that only “those who love and desire peace, draw near to God.”

A prerequisite for the acquisition of peace is inner peace. Of course, we who are Christians never disregard earthly peace. On the contrary, we believe first that earthly peace progresses together with justice and love, and second, we consider that inner peace is the necessary precondition to earthly peace. St. John Chrysostom,

expounding upon the topic of peace and war, observes that, “there are three kinds of war. The first kind is made when one state is threatened by an external enemy. The second kind, while peace abroad prevails, is when an internal battle is created between the citizens of the same country (civil war). The third kind of war is when one wars against himself. This war is the most fearful of all the others. This battle within ourselves is caused when the flesh fights against the soul, armed with carnal pleasures, anger, and fear.” Chrysostom also recommends to “try to win this war by overcoming our passions. Only then will we be able to speak about peace with our fellow man. The peace within ourselves has an immediate relationship with the peace of the world and with God, for it is the prerequisite and cause of the peace in Christ. In this way, whoever has communion with God does not have fear before any person, nor even in the face of the devil”.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4thcent.), referencing the Beatitudes of Christ on the peacemakers, observes that, “peace constitutes the loving relationship towards our fellow man, which we ourselves are called to have first and foremost (inner peace).” If we seek peace, God will be with us, and if God is with us, then nobody can be against us. The discovery of inner peace is the personal responsibility of each person. When we live peacefully within ourselves, then we can live peacefully with others.

My beloved, all that were mentioned above had as their aim to emphasize the great truth that, whichever effort for peace in the world happens without the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6), without Christ, is doomed to fail. Many speak generally and vaguely that they are interested in the spread of peace in the world, but because they do not experience it as fruit of the Holy Spirit, they neither have it in themselves nor do they have it in their own families.

For this reason, we Christians, whatever we do for this great spiritual issue of peace, must not be based in philosophical theories, political aims, or empty words, because this sort of peace which is practiced is artificial and exists insofar as the interests which created it exist. On the contrary, *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Phil. 4:7) is not an idea, but it is a Person – and this Person has a name *which is above every name*. (Phil. 2:9) This Peace is Christ. This peace in the

passages of the New Testament has not only the meaning of a normal co-existence nor of the absence of war and discord between people, but it has the meaning of Messianic salvation just as it had been proclaimed through the ages by the Prophets.

Through peace and communion with Christ, it is possible to acquire and to preserve inner peace, and through this, reconciliation and peace between all of humanity can be realized.

My beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I must ask your forgiveness because I have presented things that you already know well, but allow me to ask you once more to hear the voice of God which commands: *Seek peace and pursue it.* Let us work passionately for peace in the Korean Peninsula, as we first cultivate peace with God. In this way only shall we experience continuously the inner peace with ourselves, and we shall live in peace with our fellow man. Then, truly we shall become peacemakers and we shall have the exceptional privilege to be called sons of God.

Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Peter 5:14)