

**Homily for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2015.
St. Monica's Church, Montreal.**

I don't know about all of you, but I know that I look forward every year to hearing the magnificent blessing in the First Reading of the New Year liturgy. I am going to read it again slowly and I want you to hear it as though it is meant just for you. You can close your eyes so as to really take it all in.

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.**

Notice how you feel as you hear this blessing and let it fill your whole being. The reading goes on to say, "So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them. " As we have God's name put upon us, we know that we belong to God, to God's family; we are God's beloved.

Now we can open our eyes, and look around at all the people in this Church. The same blessing is being extended to them. Can we join in sharing this blessing with each of them?

And know that you, too, have God's name upon you; we are all part of God's family; we are all God's beloved.

And now, we can see ourselves joined with all the peoples of the Earth, all peoples created by God. We are all blessed equally by God; we have God's face shining upon us; we are God's beloved; we belong to God's family together, and we are blessed with God's Peace. In our hearts, let us join with God in this blessing of all the peoples of the Earth.

In Pope Francis' Message for the World Day of Peace both last year and this year, he has emphasized the importance of realizing the primacy of relationship, the relationship of the whole human family as equal, beloved members of God's family. We are all brothers and sisters.

In that light, we ache at the ways we so often treat each other. Each of us can remember times when we have hurt, put down, judged, dismissed, persons who are close to us. And if we are

truly honest, we can acknowledge the times when we have had thoughts, and maybe actions, which have expressed prejudice, racial discrimination, and disparagement of some persons we meet or hear about. If we do not engage in such thoughts and actions ourselves, we may recognize our **inactivity, not** speaking out against the discrimination, injustice and prejudice in our country and city. Perhaps we have not taken the time to look at the ways articles that we purchase have been manufactured. By purchasing, we may have supported industries which exploit and use other persons. In the past, I have shared with you the delegation trip I made to the Congo where we learned, first hand, of the injustice, abuse, taking of women into forced marriage, and killing, related to the manufacture and selling of our electronic devices.

It is an incredible responsibility to **live out** the meditation we began with. But this **is** the spiritual journey to which we are called by Jesus in this new year.

The Pope brings particular attention in his message for today to the reality of many forms of enslavement of persons in our world, amongst them human trafficking. In all of this, persons are treated as objects to be used, to be bought and sold. We know that in Canada there are many examples – from the unjust treatment of migrant workers to the trafficking of young women for sexual use. The First Nations of our country have, as yet, been unsuccessful in convincing the government that there should be a national inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women who have often been taken into sexual slavery. During this past year, we have been deeply distressed at the terrorist groups who have kidnapped young women and sold them into marriage or sexual slavery. This also goes on in the Congo and other African countries where there are no justice structures to call the perpetrators to accountability.

The United Nations estimates that 2.4 million people are trafficked at any given time and their exploitation generates \$32 billion in annual profits for criminals. The Global Slavery Index estimates nearly 30 million people worldwide are living in slave-like conditions.

In the light of this, I would like to return to the blessing of today. Each of those 30 million enslaved persons **and** each of the perpetrators, **and** each of us who becomes aware of these truths, has God's face shining upon us, loving us, giving us peace, reminding us that we are all together God's family. We may be blind to this great gift, we may turn away from it, and lose

touch with our true humanity, our oneness with the whole human family. God must feel very sad about that loss. We may be so wounded and afraid that, either we are not able to receive God's gift, or we may be struggling to free ourselves to live in a dignified and human way. We may be desiring to live out this blessing, to collaborate with God in realizing it, yet not sure how to do this.

Perhaps we can begin by returning to the meditation, first receiving the blessing ourselves, then joining in the blessing of all we know and meet each day, and finally, extending the blessing to all persons created by God, particularly those either suffering from injustice such as trafficking, or those perpetrating it. The blessing of God has the power to transform our world and all in it.

Secondly, we can respond to the actions called for by organizations such as Development and Peace and others who are addressing the needs and development of the most vulnerable. The Pope tells us that a major global mobilization is needed to make structural changes economically and legally to counteract the forces of injustice connected to trafficking.

Pope Francis has called human trafficking "a crime against humanity" and "an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ." How can we be in solidarity this coming year with those who are suffering, to assure them that they are, indeed, equal and beloved members with us in God's family?