

THE JOHN CARROLL SOCIETY  
*Archdiocese of Washington*

FOR OVER 65 YEARS: LAY CATHOLICS ENRICHING THEIR FAITH & SERVING THE ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON

John Carroll Society  
Margaret Mary Missar  
High School Essay Competition

2024

1st Place

Essay

Matthew 24:12-13 says, “There will be more and more evil in the world, so most people will stop showing their love for each other. But those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved”. These verses present the idea that as the world drifts away from God, people tend to follow man instead of remaining faithful to the Lord. However, those who understand that He has a plan for the world, and abide in Him, can and will calm the storm that the world is. Today’s world is an exact reflection of what Matthew explained. Peace is such a desired outcome for the world, yet maintaining peace is an ever-increasing problem. To avoid “a disunity among individuals and among nations [that] is in striking contrast to [a] perfect order in the universe” (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 4), we must focus on our faith and the four pillars of peace, which are truth, justice, love, and freedom.

St. John XXIII thought of the four pillars of peace in 1963 and they continue to be relevant to our world today. As the world changes, many societal ideas can become outdated. However, I believe that these four pillars should always be a defining part of any society. They are especially relevant in today's world as violence begins to be a recurring theme and peace is getting lost among conflicts. I think St. John XXIII focused on these four words because when applied, truth, justice, love, and freedom become a lifestyle. First, being truthful is all about being open and honest. This leads to a foundation of trust and maturity that helps build healthy relationships. Second, justice is the key to ending disagreements and maintaining order in society. Love is contagious, it spreads and unifies individuals, which unifies societies, and ultimately unifies nations. Lastly, freedom is all about self-care and being free to make your own decisions and express yourself in your own way. Each of these are required to have peace in society, peace within relationships, and peace within yourself.

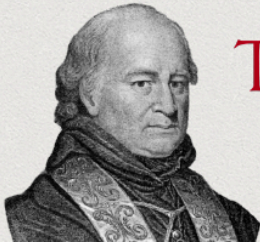
I think the moment I realized peace is necessary in society was in 2020. I witnessed the violence from police officers towards innocent black men and women, and although I was only in the 6th grade, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement really spoke to me. I had gone through my own adversities as a young black girl, so I felt like it was my responsibility to understand what was going on and do everything I could to help. For my 12th birthday, I used my birthday money to donate to a charity that supported BLM. At that time, that was all I could do to advocate for justice and freedom for those who look like me. I stayed in prayer with God to help get the black community through that hard time. I prayed for a better, safer, and more accepting community.

Christ's peace is what got us out of 2020, and what saves me every single day. In today's world, it is very important to have faith because there are so many things, such as social media and false news, that can adversely affect many parts of your life. Whenever I find myself in need of reassurance I turn to Christ to help me. He is the reason I have been able to find peace in my heart. Recently, I've been trying to strengthen my relationship with God by reading the bible daily and praying often. Because of this I've realized how much he has helped me grow and helped me find peace. I constantly remind myself that God has a plan for my life. This helps me understand that everything happens for a reason and it allows me to be calm. Through Christ's guidance, I also want to help others. It can be extremely emotional to open up about painful situations going on in your life. I constantly tell those close to me that I can be an outlet for them whenever they are going through hardships and seek serenity. Turning to God in these situations is vital, and as Psalms 56:8 says, "Tears are prayers too, they travel to God when we can't speak."

When dealing with challenging times, it's easy to be blind to positive outcomes, and only see how a situation can end badly. Giving up and quitting is often the easiest option. Hope is, at

many times, hard to hold on to, especially when one isn't looking at the bigger picture. The bigger picture is where you discover that just one person, one object, or one idea can have a big impact on your life. When I think back to 2020, hope seemed dismal. Not only was I affected by the violence against black men and women, but the world was also negatively impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The world as I knew it looked and felt very different. It seemed as if new variants were coming out every day, and the numbers of deaths were continuously rising. At that time, I thought that all hope of ever going back to normalcy was lost. That was until Dec. 11, 2020, when the first COVID-19 vaccine was released. Vaccines gained popularity, and even though people were still dying of COVID-19, I was optimistic that we would be able to live our normal lives again. This one medicine, in one small syringe, had enough of an impact to give me and millions of others just enough hope to get through the COVID-19 outbreak.

As St. John XXIII believed, in order to have peace, one must focus on being truthful and loving and strive for justice and freedom. Having peace within oneself also requires faith, and trusting and abiding in the Lord. Finding peace may not be easy, but it is necessary in our relationships with one another and for the betterment of our society and world. God has a plan for our lives and connecting with him will help us realize that further. Through my personal experiences I have been able to find peace in my heart, and now it's my responsibility to help others find peace as well.



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2nd Place

Essay

The hymn “It Is Well with My Soul” is a very well-known hymn about trust in God and peace surpassing all understanding. Its backstory, however, is full of heartbreak, sorrow, and hope. Written by Horatio Spafford and later set to music and published by Philip Bliss (“The Touching Story”). Spafford, a wealthy lawyer and successful real estate investor, was living the life of his dreams. He was married to the love of his life and had five children who he loved very much. Most importantly, Spafford was a devout Christian and believer in God. Even when his four year old son died of scarlet fever, and most of his real estate burned down in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Spafford still kept his faith and trust in the Lord. Obviously, he was no stranger to hardship.

One year, Spafford thought he would give his wife and four daughters a getaway to England (“The Touching Story”). His plan was to meet up with them after he had finished up some business work while at home. On his family’s way over, however, his daughters drowned in a collision with another ocean liner. Shortly after being rescued, his wife arrived in England, and Spafford went to join her. Supposedly, when passing over the same seas that claimed his four daughters’ lives, he penned the words to what we know now as “It Is Well with My Soul.” Despite his entire world crumbling, he had the ability to trust in God and write such a peaceful hymn. He and his wife’s lives were never the same again, but how did they manage to stay unshaken following all the tragedy that happened? The answer is simple: they had Jesus’ gift of peace.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). Is He talking about the kind of peace that you feel when everything is going well in the world? No, He isn’t. In fact, He elaborates, “Not as the world gives do I give it to you.” This otherworldly, supernatural peace is the kind Spafford and his wife had in the midst of their struggles. In this broken world,

many people are searching for peace, whether it be in their hearts, relationships, or in their country. Almost every conflict, big or small, has happened because people lack God's supernatural peace in their hearts. We tend to think of peace as a comfy feeling we get when we're safe, and when all is well. However, as explicitly demonstrated by the Spaffords, peace can be more than just a good-feeling sentiment. It is a supernatural gift from the Lord that enables us to stand firm in the darkest times.

Peace is a gift from God that stems from trust in Him (Sweetland). It doesn't come about from your position in life or your circumstances. Instead, it comes from a relationship of love and trust with God. One way I personally try to cultivate that relationship with God and subsequently that peace, is by deepening my prayer life through daily Mass and receiving the Eucharist and Penance as often as I can. This not only makes my life rooted more deeply in the Lord and unable to be shaken, but it also makes me more Christ-like. The more often we as Catholics receive Jesus in the Eucharist, the more we become like him and the more equipped we become to spread his peace and goodwill in the world.

What does sharing Jesus' goodwill and supernatural gift of peace with the world look like? Someone might think that they're too insignificant a person to make any kind of headway towards world peace. However, everyone is capable of contributing towards world peace, even if it's in the smallest of ways. I know that the odds of me becoming a world leader and signing some significant peace treaty to end a war are slim to none, but I still try to give Christ's peace to people in my life who I encounter on a daily basis. I try to do this in numerous ways, but I believe one of the simplest and most effective ways of doing this is by always putting a smile on my face and being there for others when they need me. You never know how much relief and how much comfort you can bring to someone by listening to them and making them feel loved.

Of course, I fail in doing these things sometimes, but God is there to help me get back up and return to spreading peace in the world around me. This may not be the same way others can share Christ's peace with the world, because it looks different for everyone! What counts is that people are open to God's will and are willing to spread His peace in the world.

Everyone is called to share Christ's peace and love in the world in small ways. Although this sounds like it won't have any effect on the world, seeing people do little acts of kindness and goodwill towards others makes me incredibly optimistic and hopeful for our future. If everyone would just go out of their way to take care of one another in an act of brotherly or sisterly love, the world would be a thousand times better than it is now. I understand that it isn't that simple, but that's why God is there to help us. He is there to make the impossible possible. This is why I once again emphasize the importance of developing a close friendship with God through reception of the Eucharist!

Pope John Paul II said, "In that little Host is the solution to all the problems of the world," and I strongly believe that. In my parish, many people go to daily Mass. I am unable to make it every day, but I go as often as I can. Sometimes, other teenagers my age go too. Some people even bring their toddlers! I think it is a beautiful thing to see how many people acknowledge that they need Jesus in the Eucharist to grow closer to Him. This demonstrates that the key to achieving peace in our lives and in the lives of others around us is simpler but harder than we realize. It's a challenge offered to us by God. He invites us to treat others as if they were ourselves, and deepen our friendship with the Lord through the Sacraments. The question is: will we accept this challenge?



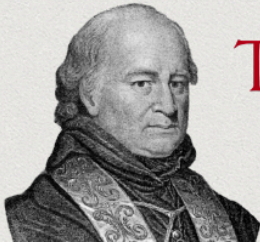
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3rd Place

Essay

## The Four Pillars of Peace

In today's world, where the announcement of war and conflict is continual, accomplishing "peace on earth" seems like a far-off dream. The increasing divisions between nations and people make it even more challenging for humanity to come together. However, Christians can play an important role in humanity by promoting the four pillars of peace and working together. By doing so, we can help navigate the world away from self-destruction and the dangers of ignorance and self-righteousness.

Sixty years ago, St. John XXIII wrote about the importance of the four pillars of peace which uphold human dignity. In modern times, his ideas are still significant because, as new challenges emerge, we require truth, justice, love, and the pursuit of freedom to overcome them. If we truly want to eliminate conflict from the world, we must all work together for harmony. While world peace may prove to be a strenuous task, the goal is attainable, but it entails that each of us takes action to make a difference.

The Apostle John draws a comparison between the church and a body, where each member is assigned different functions. Consider each member as an individual cell, working together in perfect harmony to accomplish a task. When one cell fails, it causes a chain reaction, leading to the failure of others and resulting in catastrophic effects on the whole body. The pillar of justice plays a crucial role in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or social background, are treated fairly and with the dignity they deserve. This cultivates prosperity within each member and contributes to a prosperous world.

In the encyclical of St. John XXIII, he encourages everyone to embrace love, fairness, truth, and freedom as we all have a consciousness. St. John highlighted these values because a peaceful global society must leave behind nationalist and other selfish beliefs to build positive

relationships needed for healing. When people experience this healing, it positively impacts communities, states, and nations contributing to a harmonious world. Those who follow God's teaching play a crucial role in resolving conflicts between neighbors and spreading the uplifting message through their actions.

In my life, I've seen how the simple act of listening to others can make a big difference. For instance, there was a student who always made offensive remarks and started fights, the kind of person most people avoided. His behavior piqued my interest because I did not understand what motivated him to irritate others. One day, as he was pestering, I decided to check in and ask if everything was okay. At first, he denied that there was an issue, but over time, he let his guard down. He shared the problems in his life that were making him miserable and pushing him to treat others poorly. I listened without interrupting, and after he finished speaking, I gave him advice on dealing with his problems, encouraging him to see things from a different perspective. In a few days, his demeanor transformed at school, and he began making more friends. Eventually, he changed into a completely different individual. It's essential to note that the change wasn't because of me; it was the result of the love of God that I was fortunate to convey. We are just the instruments contributing to the greater good of building up the Kingdom of Heaven.

Picture life as a big garden where everyone gets different seeds, each seed representing the Word of God and the bloom representing the unique gift God bestows upon us.

Unfortunately, some folks hesitate to accept the Word of God as they believe it is a waste of time. But the truth is, the Word of God, like seeds are, is meant to be shared for the growth and development of others. God is the gardener who takes care of the seeds and we are the soil that either rejects or accepts the seeds. Jesus, the ultimate gardener, cared for the hearts of even the

seemingly wayward. His message, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners” (NABRE, Mark 2:17) shows love’s power even for those who might seem underserving of this garden metaphor. Some may not show love until they’ve felt it themselves, the same way soil does not yield fruit without proper nutrition. Expecting love from those who haven’t encountered God’s love is like expecting a flower to bloom without sunlight. Just as a gardener doesn’t rush a flower to bloom, but rather patiently cares for it, we’re called to patiently offer love. It’s about being ready to share love and grace when others are ready to receive them and understanding that personal growth takes time. Whether someone decides to bloom or not, our role is to stay ready to share love whenever their season is right.

St. John XXIII also wrote, “The world will never be the dwelling place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of every man,” (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 165). Peace can only exist in one's heart when we allow the four pillars to sustain it. Without love, we will always be at war. Without justice or truth, people will live in fear of being prosecuted and treated unfairly. Without freedom, people can not be content with the life they live, leading to rebellion. Despite the challenges of our current times such as wars, rebellions, and increasing divisions between groups, there is hope as people are recognizing the injustices taking place around the world. The first step to healing the world is recognizing the faults so that the proper actions can be taken.

Accomplishing world peace is a challenging task that may require many years. However, taking the necessary steps today can make a significant difference tomorrow. Instead of waiting until things get worse, we need to work towards the potential future that humanity can create. Through Christ, the foundation for world peace has been established. Now, we must ask ourselves if we are willing to be the pillars that support it.

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