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Black and white photo of a pope signing a document

Pope John XXIII signs his encyclical "Peace on Earth" ("Pacem in Terris") at the Vatican in this 1963 file photo. Considered a highlight in Catholic social teaching, the encyclical addresses universal rights and relations between states. (CNS photo)

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The idea that stopping the arms race is essential for stopping war is not utopian but is "healthy realism," Pope Francis wrote.

"Only by stopping the arms race, which takes away resources for fighting hunger and thirst and ensuring medical care for those who have none, can we avert the self-destruction of our humanity," he wrote in an article for L'Espresso, an Italian magazine.

The article, released April 7, marked both Easter and the 60th anniversary on April 11 of St. John XXIII's encyclical "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth").

After the resurrection, Jesus goes to the Upper Room "where his apostles were gathered, full of fear" after watching him die on the cross, the pope said. His greeting to them is, "Peace be with you!"

Francis emphasized that greeting of Jesus in his Easter message April 9 when he spoke from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to an estimated 100,000 people gathered for his blessing. The pope repeated Jesus' words three times: "Peace be with you. Peace be with you. Peace be with you."

"Peace be with you is the greeting we exchange on this day," the pope wrote in L'Espresso. "To truly say 'no' to war and violence, it is not enough just to silence weapons and stop the aggressors. It is necessary to uproot the roots of wars and violence, which are resentment, envy and greed."

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"One must have the courage to 'disarm' hearts, to 'demilitarize' them, to remove poison and resentment," he wrote.

In the article, like in his Easter message, Francis called particular attention to Russia's war on Ukraine while also urging people not to ignore "other forgotten conflicts, other hotbeds of violence, the many 'pieces' of the Third World War that we are unfortunately living through."

Peace, he said, also requires having the courage to stop the stockpiling of weapons "because true peace cannot be born of fear."

"What is needed is what 60 years ago St John XXIII, in his encyclical 'Pacem in Terris,' called 'integral disarmament,'" he said. The idea that peace can be based on an equal balance of weapons ready to use "must be replaced by the principle that true peace can only be built in mutual trust."

Francis wrote that he knows that "to some ears these words may sound utopian, especially at this time. But it is not utopian, it is healthy realism," and the only way to move toward lasting peace.