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Pope Francis should be advised to push for peace

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

Pope Francis

Imagine getting a call from Pope Francis asking for your advice concerning the most important issues facing the Catholic church and the world.

If he asked you what kind of pope the church and world need at this moment in history, what would you say to him?

Well, if our new Holy Father asked me that question, I would first suggest he deeply reflect on the challenge given to him by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals.

In his homily during the Mass before the election of a new pope, Sodano said in light of Christ's teachings to love and serve the church and all of humanity, "the last popes have been builders of so many good initiatives for people and for the international community, tirelessly promoting justice and peace."

He then added this challenge: "Let us pray that the future pope may continue this unceasing work on the world level."

My sentiments exactly!

Throughout much of the world, where ongoing war has become the norm and where even nuclear war is not only thinkable but a real possibility (consider North Korea's recent threats to strike the United States and South Korea with nuclear weapons, and United States' counter-threats), having a pope who is deeply committed to "tirelessly promoting justice and peace" is an absolute necessity.

In addition to the inhumanity of war, Pope Francis faces a host of serious threats to human life and dignity.

In response to the catastrophic assaults and cold-hearted indifference experienced by countless persons who are unborn, poor, hungry, homeless, jobless, medically uninsured, undocumented and on death row, our new pope needs to ceaselessly and courageously stand up and proclaim "No!" to all of this cruel injustice.

And I would ask him to urge all the clergy to do the same with their preaching and example.

Also, I would request that the Holy Father mandate that all seminarians be given a much expanded exposure to Catholic social teaching, and that they be required to spend one year of their formation ministering to, and being ministered by, the poor in economically underdeveloped nations, as well as in their own country. This immersion experience would go a long way in deepening the sensitivity of clergy and laity alike to the many injustices suffered by the poor.

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Additionally, I would urge Pope Francis to take to heart, further develop and strongly attempt to infuse into the everyday life of the Catholic church the prophetic social justice and peace teachings of his recent predecessors.

Here would be an excellent place to start: Following the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Blessed John Paul II declared, "No, never again, war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked the war."

Here Blessed John Paul contributed to the development of recent papal teaching that is steadily shifting the Catholic church away from the just war theory toward nonviolent solutions based on justice and love.

I would urge Pope Francis to take the final remaining step here, and declare that war is never just and is always to be condemned as a curse upon humanity.

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about the principles of Catholic social teaching. His email address is tmag@zoominternet.net.]

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