

Pope Leo calls for an unarmed peace amid the threat of war

In his Message for the 2026 World Day of Peace on 1 January, Pope Leo XIV addresses the escalation of war, rearmament and fear in international relations, and reiterates the Church's opposition to deterrence based on military force. He calls for disarmament, dialogue and the conversion of hearts as necessary conditions for a lasting and unarmed peace.

"Peace be with you!"—the greeting of the Risen Christ—stands at the centre of the Message. Pope Leo XIV writes that these words "do not merely desire peace, but truly bring about a lasting transformation in those who receive it," affirming that Christian peace is active and disruptive in its refusal of violence.

Fear is a theme in the Pope's reflection. He warns that when societies lose sight of peace as a lived reality, they accept narratives in which war appears inevitable, even necessary.

"It is no coincidence," the Pope continued, "that repeated calls to increase military spending, and the choices that follow, are presented by many government leaders as a justified response to external threats. The idea of the deterrent power of military might, especially nuclear deterrence, is based on the irrationality of relations between nations, built not on law, justice and trust, but on fear and domination by force".

This approach, he said, does not bring security but entrenches instability and perpetuates anxiety.



When war becomes “normal”

The Message highlights a shift in political and cultural attitudes, where preparedness for war is viewed as prudent and disarmament as naïve. Pope Leo XIV writes: “When peace is not a reality that is lived, cultivated and protected, then aggression spreads into domestic and public life.” He warns that this normalisation of confrontation dominates global politics, undermining diplomacy and international law.

The Pope also addresses the role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in military decision-making. He calls this a “destructive betrayal of the legal and philosophical principles of humanism,” as machines increasingly assume responsibility for life-and-death choices, while economic interests drive rearmament.

The unarmed path of the Gospel

The Pope reiterates that the Gospel links peace and nonviolence. “The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed,” he writes, “His was an unarmed struggle in the midst

of concrete historical, political and social circumstances.”

He recalls the challenge faced even by the disciples: “Put your sword back into its sheath.” Christians, he notes, are called to recognise past complicity in violence and commit to prophetic witness.

In a world that equates strength with domination, goodness itself becomes “disarming.” Pope Leo XIV reflects: “Perhaps this is why God became a child,” pointing to the defenselessness of Bethlehem as a revelation of divine power.



A political and moral imperative

The Message also addresses public authority. Pope Leo XIV calls for a renewed commitment to diplomacy, mediation and international law, lamenting the erosion of treaties and the weakening of supranational institutions.

He highlights that peace is not a utopia but a choice – personal, communal and political. Quoting Pope Francis, he warns against narratives that present violence as inevitable, noting that such narratives are tools of domination.

The Message concludes with a vision rooted in hope, recalling the biblical promise of swords turned into ploughshares. In the Jubilee of Hope, Pope Leo XIV invites humanity to begin a “disarmament of heart, mind and life,” trusting that God’s promises call for responsibility.

Peace, he writes, “exists; it wants to dwell within us.” The task is not to create it, but to welcome it – and to allow it “to disarm us.”

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