



I am writing on Election Day 2020. The Second Reading in today's Morning Prayer was a few paragraphs from *Gaudium et spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world. This constitution, promulgated on December 7, 1965, is a major teaching of the ecumenical council establishing the Church's pastoral role in today's world. I was struck at how apt these words from 55 years ago are for us today.

[Please note: this document was written in the mid 1960's. Inclusive language had not yet been adopted and so this document may appear sexist. Please don't let that flaw interfere with hearing the Church's teaching.]

*Gaudium et spes* begins:

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."

The passage I read is as follows:

"Men must not be content simply to support the efforts of others in the work for peace; they must also scrutinize their own attitudes. Statesmen, responsible as they are for the common good of their own nation and at the same time for the well-being of the whole world, are very much dependent on the opinion and convictions of the general public. Their efforts to secure peace are of no avail as long as men are divided or set against each other by feelings of hostility, contempt and distrust, by racial hatred or by inflexible ideologies. There is then a very great and urgent need to reeducate men and to provide fresh inspiration in the field of public opinion.

"Those engaged in education, especially among young people, and those who influence public opinion, should consider it a very serious responsibility to work for the reeducation of mankind to a new attitude toward peace. We must all undergo a change of heart. We must look out on the whole world and see the tasks that we can all do together to promote the well-being of the family of man. We must not be misled by a false sense of hope. Unless antagonism and hatred are abandoned, unless binding and honest agreements are concluded, safeguarding universal peace in the future, mankind, already in grave peril, may well face, in spite of its marvelous advance in knowledge, that day of disaster when it knows no other peace than the awful peace of death.

"In saying this, however, the Church of Christ, living as it does in the midst of these anxious times, continues unwavering in hope. Time and again, in season and out of season, it seeks to

proclaim to our age the message of the Apostle: *Now is the hour of God's favor*, the hour for a change of heart; *now is the day of salvation*.

“To build peace, the causes of human discord which feed the fires of war must first be eliminated, and among these causes especially the violations of justice. Many of these causes are due to gross economic inequality and delay in providing necessary remedies. Others arise from a spirit of domination and from a contempt for others, and, among more fundamental causes, from human envy, distrust, pride and other forms of selfishness. Since man cannot bear so many violations of due order, the result is that, even where war does not rage, the world is constantly plagued by human conflict and acts of violence.

“The same evils are also found in relations between nations. It is therefore absolutely necessary that international institutions should cooperate more effectively, more resolutely and with greater coordination of effort, in order to overcome or prevent these evils, and to check unbridled acts of violence. There must also be constant encouragement for the creation of organizations designed to promote peace.” (Gaudium et Spes, nn 82-83)

Right now, our nation is *divided or set against each other by feelings of hostility, contempt and distrust, by racial hatred or by inflexible ideologies*. As the Church teaches here, “*We must all undergo a change of heart.*”

A columnist in the “Chicago Tribune” suggested that we follow the lead of other nations who had suffered internal turmoil because of many of the ills this passage of *Gaudium et spes* mentions. She suggested that, like these other nations, we establish a Committee of Truth and Reconciliation. As painful as it was to hear the peoples’ grievances, these committees eventually brought peace to their countries. Not perfect peace, but at least a removal of violence and of total distrust between groups. Perhaps we could think about this. We need to do something to heal the deep divide that currently exists. We all basically want the same thing — a united country raising our children in peace and security. A song from the 60’s told us “Love is the Answer.” And it is! Commitment to each other as one nation under God (love) *is* the answer.

*Fr. Denis*