

Peace Sunday 2005 - "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Article for a parish magazine

"How many divisions has the Vatican?" Stalin contemptuously asked. Perhaps the answer came forty years later, when the Solidarity movement, inspired by a Polish Pope, led to the collapse of communism and the fall of the Iron Curtain, with scarcely a shot being fired. At the end of Pope John Paul's papacy the theme of this year's *Peace Sunday* (which falls on January 16th) seems particularly appropriate: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The quarter-century of Pope John Paul's pontificate has thrown up a wealth of images - of the athlete skiing in the mountains, the actor able to communicate with every generation (but especially with the young), the stern moral teacher, the survivor of an assassin's bullet, the preacher of peace, who has repeatedly denounced war as "an adventure without return". But as the end of his pontificate has neared, Papa Wojtyla has added one more image to the collection - the image of powerlessness. Dependent on others to dress him, no longer able to stand, at times hardly able to speak, often in intense pain, he has offered not just an image of fidelity but also a sign of the cross. Christ, the Pope's Master and our Master too, was also powerless at the end. And yet he refused to hate his persecutors. He died as a visible failure - and yet by his death brought new life.

The theme given to this Peace Sunday is taken from St Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans (12.21): "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" In the cross of Jesus we see the clearest expression of what it means to overcome evil with good. In the ailing Pope John Paul and in the peaceful revolution that ended the Cold War we also see reflections of that drama of good overcoming evil without resorting to the evil it opposes.

So how are we *as Christians* to overcome evil? Not by violence, certainly - even if at times the use of violence may be required to protect others; not perhaps by things which seem "successful" at all. *Our* contribution to the search for peace and to overcoming the evil in our world has to be Christ-like - loving our enemies, forgiving those who persecute us and, in the end, like Pope John Paul, taking up our cross and loving to the end, whatever the cost.

Fr Rob Esdaile

Text for a parish notice or newsletter

The following text could be placed in the parish newsletter or read out on 9th January in order to prepare the parish community for Peace Sunday, or used on the day itself.

Pax Christi is an international Catholic movement for peace. We encourage Catholic Christians to try to take responsibility for peace in their own lives and in the world. **Every year, Pax Christi helps to promote Pope John Paul's annual World Peace Message on Peace Sunday - 16th January.**

Pax Christi works with others to respond to the teaching of Jesus about peace:

- by **experiencing** in our own lives the peace promised by Jesus.
- by **offering** this peace to others through witness, sharing and nonviolence.
- by working to **transform** our communities through action and advocacy for justice, work for the abolition of war and for an end to all forms of violence.

To join **Pax Christi**, or to find out more about our work, pick up a **Pax Christi** leaflet from the back of the church or write to: **Pax Christi, St Joseph's, Watford Way, Hendon, London N4 4TY or www.paxchristi.org.uk**