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- Peace is a gift from God
- The necessity of difficulty and challenge

God fills each of your souls with the gift of peace, a sense of justice, and an understanding of what it means to be patient. The experience of peace is indeed in itself a gift, for it is not a part of the activities of humankind to exist within a framework of true peace. It is the general belief of all that progress is made through challenge, and challenge exists only in the condition of unrest, the sense of restlessness. The belief in the incompleteness of something is often seen as the motivation for resolution. It is in the achieving of that resolution that one finds peace.

Such is the normal belief, but we offer you another reality, one that insists that peace is a condition received as a gift, a gift that does not deny the other reality of uncertainty and tension and restlessness. It is a gift that accompanies the other reality, for your lives are always filled with challenges, concerns for others as well as yourselves. If you expect to find peace only through the resolution of challenges, you will in fact never experience inner peace, for there is no life that is totally void of difficulty. There is no life which does not experience concern for others and for self on so many different levels. Peace then is the ability to exist among those uncertainties with a true conviction that one is proceeding according to the wishes of God and the dictates of your own spirit. When you feel in tune with those wishes and dictates, you are at peace.

The peace that is offered by God, therefore, does not require first the elimination of concern. It requires only that you be receptive to God's gift experienced within the environment of stress and concern. It is in the recognition of the gift of peace that those issues creating difficulty take on their proper significance. Those difficulties do not dictate life. Your spiritual development and growth is what gives shape and meaning to life. The difficulties you experience provide a kind of character or highlighting, but the substance of life is not the experience of difficulty but the acquisition of the gift of peace.

Each of you prays for peace. You pray for your own peace, the peace of another. You pray for peace in your community and nation. You pray for peace in the world. When you pray for peace in the nation, do you really expect that a time will come when there is no tension? Of course not. The prayer for peace is one of strengthening. It is one of perspective-giving. It is a condition which allows you to function according to God's will in a world that is not perfect and will not be perfect. You cannot shun the challenges of your daily lives and pretend they do not exist, but you can accept those challenges with an assurance that your travels in life are accompanied by God's presence, that you are guided by that presence, you are accompanied by your guides, you are instructed by your guides. Whether those instructions are seen or heard or felt

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as a hunch, peace comes from that recognition. The opportunity to experience peace, therefore, is an opportunity gained through your prayerful connection with God.

The openness of which we have spoken allows for the gift of peace to enter. When you are at peace, you are assured of your direction. You are assured of your capacity to endure, to overcome, to triumph. It is not a guarantee that all difficulties will vanish. Accept, therefore, those difficulties, those challenges. Accept the problems which are a part of your lives and the lives of all for whom your prayers are offered. Recognize the necessity of them, because they provide for you the opportunities for the exercise of faith. That exercise of faith and the recognition of faith being exercised is the source of peace. You do not first have peace and then act with faith. First must come faith, the leap into the unknown, the risk that is taken. From that action comes the sense of peace, for you understand that you moved in a direction because of your conviction of God's presence and guidance. That recognition of acting upon your conviction provides you with a sense of peace.

The inner peace that you seek is not merely an acceptance of the status quo. Inner peace may result in greater action, in greater commitment, more activity. It is not just a total quietness. It is that sense of being in the company of your God. When you feel in God's company, the gift that is received is the sense of peace. Notice we say that first comes the action and then the sense of peace. The action is initiated by you. Peace is not handed on a platter per se, received because it has been asked for. It is you who ultimately bear the responsibility of providing the environment for peace to be received.

Each of you has it in your ability and potential to create the sense of peace for which you pray. You must seek out opportunities to recognize when you have acted in faith, when you have taken a stand based on your assumption, your hope that somehow God would be joined with you in the effort. Such acts of faith are exercised not out of complete knowledge, for then they would no longer be acts of faith and they would no longer provide strength. If you knew the answers to all of your questions and the immediate solutions to all of your challenges, there would be no need to have faith. You must first recognize your response through the condition of faith in order to recognize and receive the peace you seek. Again, first comes the action and then the inner peace.

Certainly there are many occasions in life when actions are called for because you are peaceful. The peace that you experience provides a vision of its own, and that vision is then responded to through action. This peace does not exist by itself. It is the result first of action, and then it is the source for more action. That action that serves as the result of peace leads to the dissemination of peace within a broader context. If in your thoughts you can find witness to your acts of faith, you are given clear vision of God's presence that brings peace. With the confidence that comes with that peace, you

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are empowered to give witness, so to speak, of that peace to an enlarged circle in your life.

Peace is indeed to be sought after. It is to be worked for, and when it is received it is to be given out. It is to be displayed, to be shown, to be shared. If you consider individuals you have known in your lives, you will find those who have been especially peaceful. Recognizing that peace has been a kind of strength-giving for each of you, for the recognition of peace brings with it the acknowledgment of its potential to be experienced by yourselves. As you live exercising peace, you are showing others the importance of that peace. They may not be aware of how you obtained it, but they will recognize immediately its strength and its importance to their lives. As you exercise peace, the influence of peace is expanded outward. That is part of the action that takes place when one feels that peace.

Never be complacent. Never remain in a space in your life where all seems perfect. There is no progress in that life. There is no opportunity for growth. There is no chance for the spirit to deepen in character and strength. What is important is what you do with the peace that you experience. That's what makes a difference in the world. Do what must be done to achieve peace, and then use that peace for the benefit of the world around you.

Peace is indeed a gift. You receive it from God. You receive it because you have seen God in some manner in your lives. Those who never experience peace are those who have never seen God. Obviously we do not refer to a visual sense of God but an emotional awareness of God's presence, a spiritually vibrating experience. Such experiences each of you has had and will have in the future. Grasp onto those experiences, draw from them the recognition of God's presence, for that is indeed the real source of the peace that you seek.

When you pray for peace, you are really praying for the ability to recognize God's presence. Without recognition, there is no peace. With no peace, there cannot be any expansion of its influence in the world. If you wish to encourage peace in the community, you must recognize God in your personal life. These relationships that we describe are essential but also universal.

All people have had experiences in their lives which can point to the presence of God. There are many who choose not to recognize those experiences, who do not wish to look in the direction that is indicated. But if you are willing to be open to a vision of God, then you will undoubtedly be given the kind of peace that is really for the spirit, that really nurtures the soul and that enhances the value of your human lives. Love is a great gift, and it is the vehicle by which you receive the peace you pray for. By loving another, you recognize the godliness in another. By loving life, you recognize God's presence in life. Pray for the capacity to love, the capacity to be loving, and you will be given the vision of God that leads to peace.

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We love you, and therefore we see God in each of you. It is in many ways through each of you that we experience peace. You are in your ways teachers every bit as much as we are teachers for you. You learn of God through us, and we see your acts of faith which serve as an inspiration for us, for we see God in those actions and that gives us peace. Our interrelationship is permanent, it is intense, it is open and fully loving, and we rejoice therefore in your presence and in the light of God that illuminates our two worlds of spiritual life.

We bless you with that light.

Amen.