

# Peace and Forgiveness as the Path to Reconciliation

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## Introduction

Over the past few months, we have been faced with the reality of the Kamloops findings of 215 unmarked graves. It has brought great suffering and memories of the residential school history in Canada. There is no justification or excuse for abuses that took place in these schools, and it only divides us if we deny the suffering and trauma it has caused to indigenous families in Canada.

Therefore, it's important and essential for us to be gathered here to pray together for all the children who were taken from their families when they were very young. We pray for those who did not return home, for those who were abused physically and psychologically, and for the ongoing generational suffering which continues to affect our indigenous families in our community. We also pray to God for the strength, wisdom and mainly for His Holy Spirit, so that we may move forward and build a community where we can grow together in understanding, love, justice, and peace.

## The road to reconciliation is through peace.

Our Christian notion of peace is always in reference to Christ. In the scriptures, He is called **the Prince of Peace**. It is He who has brought us the real peace which begins within us, and not outside of us as an exterior act. If we have peace within ourselves, that makes for peace around us. This is true because Christ gave His unconditional love to every person on earth. And through this love, He has given us the opportunity to not only feel peace within us and hold on to it, but also to share our peace with others. In this we discover our real call and purpose in life as sons and daughters of God; that we are called to Love and Unity. When we forget this essential call, we run the risk of looking for our own selfish and egoistic purpose in life.

One aspect that causes a kind of confusion in our mind is that sometimes we think that peace is an absence of problems and challenges, but this is not true. We know this because we often find people with many problems and yet so resilient and strong. They continue on with their lives and continue fighting for peace. This tells us that even when the conditions around us are not what we would prefer, we can still have peace and look at life with optimism.

Christ tells us in his gospel that service towards others makes us grow in faith and in love. Often when we share the wounds and pains of others, we grow in compassion. When we go through suffering ourselves, we can understand better other people's suffering; Just as when we are helped, we also want to help others. This exchange is a gift from the Holy Spirit, and it is what brings our society to grow in unity and love with one another.

To treat each other with dignity and love brings about a road for healing and reconciliation: A healing process that starts within each person by loving ourselves as God's children; a healing which is measured in the service we render to those most in need; a healing which bring unity in spite of our ethnic background, skin colour or beliefs.

## How can we find that peace within ourselves?

Jesus is the one who took upon Himself the offences and sins of the world to make of all us brothers and sisters. This is how we came to be reconciled with God and with our brothers and sisters. Jesus' death on the cross was not an act of kindness or good will as we often think of, but rather, at its very essence, it was an act of Love from God. We find in the scriptures "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for the salvation of the world." Today, Christ wants to share this love with us and make us feel his love and kindness. This moment of prayer is aimed at uniting us as one in Christ. We need to give Christ the opportunity to work within us and make of us brothers and sisters. Through the working of His Holy Spirit, Christ wants to give us this experience.

It is our aim in life to seek to follow Christ even when the road is hard and challenging. In his message during the World Day of Peace in January 2002, Pope St. John Paul II told us that "For Peace to exist, there must be justice but there cannot be justice without forgiveness". He said this "to believers and non-believers alike, to all men and women of good will who are concerned for the good of the human family and for its future". If we stop for a moment and think about this quote, we recognize that Christ has always forgiven us and will always forgive us. And He invites us to do the same for others.

## What does peace and forgiveness have to do with reconciliation

Our history has a lot to do with how we look at ourselves and how we see our future. If our experience when we were young was hurtful and traumatic, this influences our decisions and often makes us think that love does not exist and that we are alone in this world with no one to help us. It is only when we are reconciled with our history and understand it, that we can move forward and change our path. We can move towards a better future where justice has a place, and where Peace and Forgiveness also have a place.

## What can we do

We can't tell someone that we love them if we don't even know what makes them suffer. Today we are gathered as a Catholic School in solidarity with our First Nations brothers and sisters, to listen to them, and to pray together that Our Heavenly Father may heal us, especially those who went to residential schools.

With the help of God, we can keep working to, first, end the violence in our hearts, and then, to restore peace within ourselves so as to secure a future of peace for our generation and the future generations to come.