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Pope begins Advent with call for peace, dismantling of weapons

Joshua J. McElwee | Dec. 1, 2013 NCR Today
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Pope Francis on Sunday began the Christian season leading to the celebration of Christmas with a call to Christians to enter into a never ending journey of peace towards the destruction and re-purposing of the world's weapons and armaments.

Speaking during his weekly Sunday Angelus blessing with pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, the pontiff said the beginning of the Advent season is the beginning of a new stage of the "journey of the People of God" with Jesus "towards the Kingdom of justice, towards the Kingdom of peace."

Quoting several times from the prophet Isaiah, Francis twice repeated the prophet's vision of a time when the world's nations will dismantle their weapons.

"Allow me to repeat what the prophet says -- listen well," the pope told those in the square before repeating for a second time the scriptural passage: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

"What a great day it will be, in which the weapons will be dismantled in order to be transformed into instruments of work," said the pope. "This is possible. We bet on the hope, the hope of peace, and it is possible."

The journey towards peace, said Francis, "is never finished." Just as individuals are continually trying to understand the purpose of their lives, he said, "so the human family is always needing to renew the common horizon toward which we are journeying."

That horizon, he said, is "the horizon of hope." That horizon, he said, "is the horizon that makes for a good journey."

Isaiah is an Old Testament prophet who was writing of a time when the leaders of the world would flock to the top of a mountain established as God's house on earth, where the Lord would judge them.

The passage referring to the turning of swords into plowshares is used frequently by Christian peace activists, who invoke the image particularly in calling for the dismantling of the world's nuclear arsenals.

Hundreds of people gathered in the square for the blessing Sunday despite persistent rain and blowing wind.

Following the recitation of the Angelus prayer, Francis also mentioned that Sunday is World AIDS Day and expressed particular concern for child victims of HIV/AIDS. He also praised the world of women religious and others who serve the needs of the disease's victims.

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