



My Dear Sisters and Brothers,

There is a zoo in Mexico which I visited a few years ago, and it has one exhibit which is labelled “the most dangerous animal on the planet”. As you look in to the enclosure to see that animal, you see yourself. For what is in the enclosure is a mirror, and the most dangerous animal is humanity. Human beings are a danger to the world and to themselves.

When we lock the door of our house at night, we do so to protect ourselves from our fellow human beings. When our country stockpiles its arms and builds up its military defences, it does so to protect itself from our fellow human beings.

We all long for peace, we have a deep desire for peace – yet peace is shattered by our fellow human beings.

Each year we start the new year with a prayer for peace, but, as we do so, we look around and see war and conflict, death and destruction – all caused by humanity.

Every dispute arises, every fallout with our neighbour starts, every military intervention begins in the same place - the human heart. Because in our heart there is anger, bitterness, greed, envy, pride, fear. It only takes a little spark to flame a fire.

The more at risk we feel, the more we take action to protect ourselves, with better locks on our door, or more weapons for our army. Better locks on our door may help keep out the thief, but more arms for our army just tends to encourage our potential enemy to do the same and increase their weapons, and we end up no safer than we were before.

So, our prayer for peace is not just that armies will stop fighting, that acts of terrorism and warfare will cease, that countries will live in harmony with one another. Our prayer is for every human heart, our own included, to be purified of all that is within it that leads to conflict. We pray for disagreements to be settled without resorting to violence, for human life be valued as precious, and for the taking of human life to never be seen as a means to resolve human disputes.

We are each of us part of humanity, and we all struggle to have that peace in our heart, that leads to peace in our family, in our neighbourhood and in our world.

We *pray* for peace, since only with God’s help can we overcome the human weakness that makes humanity a danger to the world and a danger to ourselves.

May God answer our prayer and fulfil the longing of our heart for peace.

With my prayers and good wishes,

+William Nolan

Archbishop of Glasgow, President of Justice & Peace Scotland