

Our Father  
(Anthologie...  
Russie 14)

## EPIPHANY PREFACE

The lights and decorations may be still on in the Central district and other places, but schools have re-opened <sup>last week</sup> and the stock-exchange seems to be more or less back to normal — the Christmas season is, for most people, and to all intents and purposes, <sup>well-truly</sup> ~~over~~. May it not be, though, forgotten / put out of mind — its spirit, its message of harmony and peace. How fragile that can be, even in such a supposedly peaceful community as Hong Kong, was shown by the ugly incidents we did have among the Christmas Eve crowds: whatever the causes or reasons, there was not peace in the hearts, behaviour and attitudes of everyone there that night. That may seem a long way from war and the threat and risk of unimaginable horror and destruction that hangs over the world from nuclear arms races and international tensions and disputes. But is it? When we pray for peace in the world, it's for our own conversion too that we pray: for ordinary people as well as for the decision-makers and for whole nations. Towards the end of last year, there were numerous large demonstrations in favour of peace in many European countries: in America and elsewhere there's been a very heated debate been going on about nuclear weapons and their morality, about how to achieve and preserve peace. If nothing else, it shows the fear there is in people's hearts, and the widespread desire and will for peace among people, that's not confined to marchers and demonstrators and debaters. It's something that's shared by every sensitive human heart, not a monopoly of any

one movement or party or ideology. It's a prayer (maybe unspoken, often) of everyone who in some way or other recognises God. But especially at the beginning of the year and in the spirit and season of Christmas, we're invited to make that prayer more explicit, to pray for peace, the peace which is God's gift. In this gift-giving season may we remember that it's God's gifts we've been specially celebrating — and that the peace we long for and pray for is above all this gift. | And that has been the theme, this year, of the annual new-year peace message of the Pope, following an initiative of Pope Paul 6 in the late 60s: 'Peace, a gift of God entrusted to us'. So today, and on Thursday <sup>next week</sup> in these Middle Prayers, I'd like to continue with some quotations from Pope John Paul's message. In what he says, he's very clearly in some places obviously thinking of recent events and situations in his own country: but that doesn't make his appeals any less forceful for all of us: we are, after all, brothers and sisters together in one world... we pray for each other as well as ourselves. May the invitation to pray and to work for peace touch each of us so that together we may <sup>be open</sup> for the gift of God to come among us and be fruitful for all of the human family, giving us that peace which this world can't give us. Let us then begin our formal prayer with the prayer in music: 'Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace': MUSIC (Agnus Dei)

Durable  
Carpenter

## PRAYERS

The Pope addressed his NYear message this year to 'the young who in the world of tomorrow will make the great decisions:

to the men & women who today bear responsibility for life in society, to families and teachers, to individuals & communities, to heads of state and government leaders. Today (he said) peace has become, throughout the world, a major preoccupation not only for those responsible for the destiny of nations but even more so for broad sections of the population and numberless individuals who generously and tenaciously dedicate themselves to creating an outlook of peace and to establishing genuine peace between peoples & nations. But there's no hiding the fact that there are still serious threats to peace in the world... in the form of divisions within nations, of deep-rooted & acute tensions between nations. These confrontations are world-wide, now: even a local conflict can be (in reality) an expression of tensions somewhere else, and may have profound effects far from where it breaks out. These tensions now, mobilize all the forces of the nations involved, not just military but economic, technological and the use of mass media. And modern conflicts concern the survival of the whole human race, given the destructive capacity of present-day weapons & arms stockpiles. The causes of this situation are of course complex... but... are relationships between people so continues inevitably along lines of incomprehension and recurrent confrontation? In the final analysis, when we consider the question of peace, we're led to consider the meaning and conditions of our own personal and community lives. For peace isn't so much a superficial balance of interests as something that's essentially of human nature, the fruit of truth and virtue, of a moral order that comes from God, the source of life, the essential truth and the supreme good. Peace is founded in God: it is His gift.