



Hiroshima, Japan
August 5, 2023

Dear Friends of Peace,

It is a profound grace for me to be with you today. I am grateful to Bishop Shirahama for allowing me to share some thoughts.

I was reminded once again of the peril of nuclear weapons after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. I am here to learn and explore ways I can be an effective advocate for nuclear disarmament. I have no idea where this path will lead, but I know that God has asked me to undertake this journey for peace.

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I did not seek to get involved with this issue, but the Holy Spirit placed it with me. And if you're curious what the Holy Spirit looks like, it is much like Archbishop Wester! I am grateful to Archbishop Wester for asking me to join him on this Pilgrimage of Peace. I am well versed on the climate crisis, and clearly see how nuclear weapons also pose an existential threat to life on the planet.

Yesterday Archbishop Wester and I toured the Peace Park and the Memorial Museum. It was certainly a sad and somber experience. I was also inspired by so many manifestations of your dedication to work for a peaceful world. I did not expect the multiple examples of creativity and hope.

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When I was first ordained a bishop, I lived just down the road from Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The base controls 150 nuclear missiles, each with twenty times the destructive power of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

Since moving to Seattle in 2019, my office is twenty miles west of where eight Trident submarines are based – the largest concentration of deployed nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal. Each of the eight submarines carries 80 nuclear warheads, and each warhead is 30 times more destructive than the Hiroshima bomb.

It is impossible to grasp such numbers or the destruction caused by such weapons. Those of you in Hiroshima know this too well: even one nuclear weapon is too many.

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Elsewhere in Washington state, there are two uranium mines on tribal land as well as the Hanford nuclear site, which produced the plutonium that destroyed Nagasaki in 1945. Scattered across the country are 2 million people who were exposed to the large radiation releases from Hanford's plutonium manufacturing. Today, there are many people in the U.S. who still suffer from their radiation exposures decades ago, just like here in Japan.

Pope Francis has made it clear that we must move beyond deterrence and take progressive steps toward a world without nuclear weapons. This will require creativity, meaningful dialogue, and courage from all of us.

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Unfortunately, there has been scant progress in nuclear disarmament over the last two decades. Instead, the three largest nuclear powers are spending billions modernizing their nuclear arsenals. Each of these nuclear powerhouses should exercise leadership for peace by taking their nuclear weapons off alert and pledging to never be the first to use nuclear weapons. By also freezing nuclear modernization programs, they could change the dynamics of this new nuclear arms race. Such courageous action would put international pressure on others to join.

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Many human needs go unmet because we spend vast sums on nuclear weapons. We could better use the money to combat climate change, poverty and hunger, mental health support, education of our youth and myriad other global needs. Imagine what could happen if the nuclear powers launched a peace race instead of an arms race?

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The life of each human person on the planet is an immense gift from God. In serving God, we are called to do more to provide for the common good and to support human flourishing.

To close, I want to repeat the appeal I made last October on the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I urge you to join me in these three actions:

1. Intensify our prayers for peace;
2. Educate ourselves about the nuclear peril; and
3. Advocate for nuclear disarmament through dialogue with our families, friends and government leaders.

In the words of St. Pope John Paul II when he visited here in 1981, "To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace."

Already this pilgrimage to Japan has deepened my commitment to peace. After I return to Seattle, I will implore others to join the quest for peace.

Through the intercession of Our Lady, the Queen of Peace, let us strive to lead holy lives by loving our enemies as well as our neighbors.

From Psalm 122:

For love of you my brothers and sisters, my friends we say: "Peace upon you!" For the love of the house of the Lord, we will ask for your good.

Peace be with each of you.