HOMILY: Vigil Mass for Peace

Given by Robert Cardinal McElroy, Archbishop of Washington

Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, Washington, DC

Saturday, April 11, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

In the appearances of the Risen Lord to the Apostles in today's reading from the *Gospel of John*, Jesus's first words are always, "Peace be with you." For peace is the ultimate fruit and gift of the Resurrection: an inner conviction that Christ has conquered death once and for all.

The peace of the Resurrection understands that we have been placed on this Earth with a mission and a purpose that calls us to ennoble the world and prepare ourselves for the kingdom of God. The peace of the Resurrection assures us that all those whom we have loved deeply in this life and who have gone before us in death are not gone from us forever, but we will see them once again face-to-face, and see and know and love in them all the qualities that we saw and knew and loved in them here in this world.

The peace of the Resurrection reveals to us that we are already citizens of heaven.

It is in the peace of the Resurrection that we find the only essential compass that we need for our lives on this Earth. It is pure gift.

But it is also a responsibility. For as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called profoundly to be peacemakers in the world in which we live.

We are called in the first place to be builders of peace within our own hearts and souls, refusing to give in to the urges of anger and judgmentalism and selfishness that can so easily warp our lives and dim the light of the Resurrection.

We are called to be bridge builders and reconcilers in our family life, overcoming the normal tensions which have been exacerbated by the social isolation and technological suffocation that have proliferated in the age in which we live.

We are called to be peacemakers within this nation which we love so deeply, refusing to allow the cancer of polarization to swallow up the noblest dreams of our founders in this very year in which we celebrate our 250th birthday as a country.

Finally, we must be builders of peace among nations, rejecting the pathway of war that lures us toward the ending of civilizations and the pursuit of domination rather than true peace.

It is this last responsibility which weighs most heavily upon us this night. For we are in the midst of an immoral war. We entered this war not out of necessity but rather choice. We failed to ardently pursue the pathway of negotiation to its end before turning to war. We had no clear intention, instead darting from unconditional surrender to regime change to the degradation of conventional weapons to the removal of nuclear materials. And we blinded ourselves to the cascade of global destructiveness that would likely flow from our attacks – the expansion of the war far beyond Iran, the disruption of the world economy, and the loss of life. Each of these policy failures is equally a moral failure which under Catholic just war principles renders both the initiation of this war and any continuation of it morally illegitimate.

Pope Leo has made it totally clear that the only pathway which Catholic teaching allows at this moment is the permanent cessation of hostilities and vigorous steps to build up the conditions for a lasting peace. It is, as he points out, in the conversion of hearts and souls that the only true pathway to just and lasting peace can be found, a conversion which casts aside our weapons and begins with reconciliation first.

Tonight we gather in prayer. We pray that the ceasefire holds and that it leads to a substantive foundation for the emergence of peace in the Middle East. We are aware of the barbaric nature of the Iranian regime, and the enormous destruction U.S. and Israeli bombing has visited on Iran. And so we pray all the harder. We must do so. We desperately ask our God, the Prince of Peace, to open the minds and hearts of all those in positions of power to look beyond their own interests and see in its fullness the well-being of all those ensnared in this bitter and needless conflict.

And when we leave this church this night, we must move beyond prayer. As citizens and believers in this democracy that we cherish so deeply, we must advocate for peace with our representatives and leaders. It is not enough to say we have prayed. We must also act. For it is very possible that the negotiations will fail because of recalcitrance on one or both sides, and our president will move to reenter this immoral war. At that critical juncture, as disciples of Jesus Christ called to be peacemakers in the world, we must answer vocally and in unison: No. Not in our name. Not at this moment. Not with our country.

The Roman Catholic
Archdiocese *of* Washington