



**HOMILY MGR. JOHAN BONNY, BISHOP OF ANTWERP
OPENING INTERRELIGIOUS MEETING FOR PEACE
'PEACE IS THE FUTURE'**

**Cathedral of Our Lady Antwerp
Pontifical Mass, Sunday 7 September 2014, 10 am**

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the Eucharist repeatedly and with instance we pray for peace. The one but last prayer before communion is the 'Lamb of God'. The third and final time we pray: *'Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace. Dona nobis pacem'*. The 'Lamb of God' is Jesus Christ. He was and remains the Word of God who became man. He went out to people without violence and full of mercy. He called them to forgiveness and reconciliation. Eventually He went one step further. He took upon himself the sin and evil of the world. Defenseless as a lamb He was led to slaughter. He was condemned to the cross and gave his life as an expiatory sacrifice for many. Through His resurrection we are all born again. Where once the tree of passion stood, now stands the tree of life. The first and most beautiful fruit of that tree is the one of reconciliation and peace. It is the first gift of Jesus when He comes to meet us in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is the first gift for which we pray today. Didn't Jesus say in the Gospel to his disciples: *'if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven'*.

We bring to the Lord our prayers for peace, together with brothers and sisters of Churches and Ecclesial Communities coming from all over the world. Today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow they are in Antwerp for the international meeting *'Religions and Cultures in Dialogue'* organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio, in cooperation with the Diocese of Antwerp and the City of Antwerp. This annual meeting carries on the spirit of the first meeting that took place in 1986 in Assisi, at the invitation of Pope John Paul II. Along with Christian participants, leaders and representatives of other world religions will also share in our meeting. It is our desire to dialogue with one another in an atmosphere of brotherhood and reconciliation. We also want to make a statement towards our society and the world community. As religions we badly need a more peaceful world and we are willing to work for that. In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul summarizes his message in this single word: *'Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbour'*. Our meeting takes place in the perspective of that hope and that commitment.

This international meeting takes place in Antwerp exactly 100 years after our region and our city were tormented by the terrible events of the first World War. Great numbers of soldiers died in action and much more citizens left the city, in long chains of suffering and uncertainty. Some days later initiated the murdering battle that would last for four years, in one long frontline reaching from the IJzer to the Somme. In these days we devoutly commemorate all victims of the first World War. But not only them. We feel close to all victims of present-day war and violence, along so many frontlines spread all over the world. Together with them and with all people yearning for peace we pray: *'Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace. Dona nobis pacem'*.

Amen.

+ Johan Bonny
Bishop of Antwerp