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A new peace in the kingdom

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On this Christmas Day 1978, soldiers guard the borders of the towns where Jesus was born and lived. Peace in the Middle East, which in September seemed at last to be at hand, is eluding the most diligent efforts of diplomats and political leaders. The angels who once sang, "Peace on earth, good will toward men," seem to be without voices, for the peace that Jesus brought to the Judean hills when he was born is not present today.

What might be done diplomatically or politically to ease the tensions between the Egyptian people and the Israeli people is not for me to say. But I believe that the problems that beset Jesus' land when he was born beset that land today, because the problem then as now is that too many of us fail to recognize the kingdom of God and the peace that it brings.

The major lesson that we can learn from Christmas is that Jesus was born among us to bring us to the kingdom of love.

God made a promise long ago that He would offer salvation to each one of us. When Jesus was born, God's promise was being fulfilled and new things became possible in our lives. The realization of those possibilities depends, though, on our decisions and on our faith or

lack of faith. And the kingdom of love that God promised can only happen when we enter into dialogue with God through faith and in prayer.

As Christians and Catholics we believe that God is concerned with us, not in a stand-offish way but in a close personal relationship. Jesus shows us a concerned and loving Father — concerned even about the sparrows. He tells us that the signs of the coming of the kingdom are seen in everyday things like a farmer sowing seed or a woman baking bread. To believe, though, that God is close to us, we need to meet Him in prayer.

Prayer will help us to recognize that our world needs God. We need to admit more and more often that our lives are dependent on His. We must recognize that if the kingdom of God is to be established on earth, no battle, no political struggle, no class war will establish it. Only God's gift will make it happen. But it is difficult to be a believer today; difficult to believe that God's kingdom has begun.

Why is it difficult to be a believer in our times? Because the believer expects nothing from himself and everything from God, and our society rebels against what it perceives as passivity in accepting God's omnipotence.

Does being a believer mean that we will just sit back and trust —

do nothing about our world? Absolutely not. We must do all in our power to achieve justice in our world, to live our lives as though we believe in Jesus Christ and in His law, and at the same time trust that God will continue to care for our world.

The person of faith — the believer — knows that peace in the Middle East is possible. But he also knows that it will only be achieved when people are willing to trust each other and love one another. That kind of trusting and loving occur in an atmosphere wherein we respond to God's gifts in prayer.

If we are to be people of faith, then Christmas time is a good time for us to think about the role of prayer in our lives. Prayer is the sign of the person of faith. While diplomatic and political action takes place in a swirl around the Middle East, perhaps we of the Archdiocese of Baltimore should do our part to help achieve peace.

Our efforts will be the efforts of believers — people who pray to God and ask Him to intervene in our world. Let us pray that His kingdom, which first appeared in one tiny corner of the world — the corner He chose as the birthplace of His Son — will spread eventually to all corners of the world so that they may know the peace of God's kingdom come on earth.

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