

**Homily - Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of St. Thomas More NYC**  
**Solemnity of Mary Mother of God - January 1, 2019**

I once heard the story of a man walking along a beach and acting rather strangely. He was bending down, examining the many starfish that were washed up along the shore. The "stars," as they are called, were powerless to fight the pounding surf and return to the security of deeper water. For, in the end, the sea rejects its offspring. And so, the stars were littered along the coast, left to die, their tiny breathing pores stuffed with sand, and the rising sun threatening their frail bodies with the new day's heat. This strange man would go from "star" to "star;" he'd stoop and search for any sign of life. And if his hopes were realized, he would hurl the gasping "star" beyond the offshore pull of the tide returning the uprooted "star" to its home. And though death was wanting more quickly than he along this and every other beach in the world, he still went about his task of rescuing these stranded "stores," in the hope that at least some would be saved. In his own way he was affirming the value of life, any life, even of tiny subhuman life.

What this "star thrower" did gives us cause to reflect. If such tiny life could be so revered, what of life in its higher forms –what of the life of man and woman and child and the unborn? What steps do I, do you, take to protect life as it is this threatened by the waves destruction in our world today? On this World Day of Prayer for Peace that was instituted by Pope Paul VI almost 50 years ago, we are asked to reflect on how we translate the call of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to be "peace-makers" into our daily lives. At times those attempts to make peace may seem as small and ineffectual as those of the man tossing the stranded starfish back into the sea, but they should never be discounted or written off, because our faith tells us it is the Holy Spirit who is working in us through each of those seemingly tiny acts. As the words of the hymn proclaim, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

The Christmas Story can be easily sentimentalized. We have images stored in our minds of legions of angels singing over the stable in Bethlehem. For the first followers of Jesus that did not appear to them as something quaint or precious. It reminded them of the Roman legions who had taken possession of their land and who ruled them with an iron fist. It reminded them of the brutality of the Roman Empire that had conquered the Mediterranean world. It was indeed a time of peace, a time heralded by the poets and pundits of the day as the "Pax Romana." But, as the Roman historian, Tacitus. described that kind of peace in his account of the Roman conquest of Britain. "They create a wasteland and call it 'peace.'" (Today it is Mosul, Aleppo, Raqqa.) The legions of angels at Bethlehem are announcing something different when they sing,

“Glory to God in the highest and peace to those on whom God’s favor rests.” This, as Jesus says, is the kind of peace the world cannot give, but comes only from an openness to God’s own Holy Spirit.

So today let us pray that each of us can be instruments of God’s peace, as in the Prayer of St. Francis,” in our homes, in the various communities in which live, and importantly also in our role as citizens, so that we decide how our vote can make a difference in achieving national and world peace. Let us as ask for the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of Peace, that we can imitate the example Her Son set for us.