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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Normandy Landings

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father to Bishop Jacques Habert of Bayeux, France, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the Normandy landings:

Message of the Holy Father

To His Excellency Bishop Jacques Habert of Bayeux and Lisieux

BAYEUX

I am pleased to join in thought and prayer with all those gathered in Bayeux Cathedral to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. I welcome all the civil, religious and military authorities present.

We remember the colossal and impressive collective and military effort made to restore freedom. And we also think of the cost of this effort: these immense cemeteries with thousands of soldiers' graves in rows - most of them very young, and many of them from far away - who heroically gave their lives, thus bringing the Second World War to an end and restoring peace, a peace that - at least in Europe - will have lasted almost 80 years. The D-Day landings also conjure images of the towns and cities of Normandy that were completely devastated: Caen, Le Havre, Saint-Lô, Cherbourg, Flers, Rouen, Lisieux, Falaise, Argentan... and so many others; and let us remember the countless innocent civilian victims and all those who suffered from these terrible bombardments.

But the landings evoke, more generally, the disaster represented by this atrocious world conflict in which so many men, women and children, so many families were torn apart, and so much destruction was wrought. It would be pointless and hypocritical to commemorate it without condemning and rejecting it definitively; without renewing the cry of Saint Paul VI from the rostrum of the United Nations on 4 October 1965: *never again war!* Although, for several decades, the memory of the errors of the past supported the steadfast determination to do everything possible to avoid a new open world conflict, I note with sadness that this is no longer the case today

and that men have a short memory. May this commemoration help us to recover it!

It is worrying, in fact, that the possibility of widespread conflict is sometimes once again being seriously considered, that people are gradually becoming familiar with this unacceptable possibility. People want peace! They want conditions of stability, security and prosperity in which everyone can fulfil their duties and destinies in peace. Destroying this noble order of things for ideological, nationalistic or economic ambitions is a serious mistake before mankind and before history, a sin before God.

So, Your Excellency, I wish to join in your prayers and those of all those gathered in your Cathedral:

Let us pray for the men who want wars, those who start them, stir them up senselessly, maintain and prolong them uselessly, or cynically profit from them. May God enlighten their hearts, and set before their eyes the trail of misfortune they cause!

Let us pray for peacemakers. On the contrary, it requires the greatest courage, the courage to know how to give up something. Even if the judgement of men is sometimes harsh and unjust towards them, "the peacemakers ... will be called children of God" (*Mt* 5:9). May they oppose the implacable and obstinate logic of confrontation and be able to open up peaceful paths of encounter and dialogue. May they persevere tirelessly in their endeavours, and may their efforts be crowned with success.

Finally, let us pray for the victims of wars, both past and present. May God welcome all those who died in these terrible conflicts, and may He come to the aid of all those who suffer today; the poor and the weak, the elderly, women and children are always the first victims of these tragedies.

May God have mercy on us! Invoking the protection of Saint Michael, patron saint of Normandy, and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, I wholeheartedly impart my Blessing to each and every one of you.
