

The US-based think tank, the *Fund for Peace*, and the Australian-based research center, the *Institute for Economics and Peace*, have attempted over the past several years to rank various nations of the world in terms of their relative peacefulness.

The former uses 12 factors including national security, economic stability, human rights, and flow of refugees to determine what it calls the *Fragile States Index* – using factors which reflect how the nation relates its own citizens. While the latter uses 21 factors in the areas of safety and security, domestic and international conflict, and militarization to enumerate its *Global Peace Index* – using factors that reflect how the nation relates to the world at large.

Despite their differences in approach, they correlate on 7 of the 10 least peaceful nations, and agree on 6 of the 10 most peaceful nations.

The United States ranks in the top 20 in terms of stability, but falls to 100 in regards to peace.

The *Fund for Peace* has even gone so far as to rank the 50 US states in terms of homicides and violent crimes, numbers of prisoners and police officers, and access to small arms. This *US Peace Index* ranks the state of Maine as the most peaceful, and the state of Louisiana as the least; with Michigan coming in at number 29 out of 50.

Today is the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time. In today's second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, he zeroes in on *peace* from three different perspectives.

First, St. Paul points out the Jesus Christ is *our peace*. Then he explains how Christ *established peace within us*. And finally, Paul indicates that the message of the Gospel is *ultimately peace*.

Indeed, our own willingness to allow Christ to reign in our hearts and our lives, is intimately tied in with our efforts to embody the message of the Gospel in ourselves and in the world.

We cannot experience the peace of God's kingdom if we are at war with ourselves or our neighbors. Christ must reign over all things, but too

often the biggest obstacle to establishing His peaceful reign in the world is in our hearts.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah laments over Israel's shepherds' failure to nurture and lead His chosen people; while in the Gospel, Jesus shows His desire to guide His shepherd-less sheep. The Psalm response is a reflection on the true shepherd – God Almighty ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For if we ignore God's commandments and seek, rather, to follow our own way – we become sheep without a shepherd ... a ship without a rudder.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray that, through the graces of today's Eucharist, we might allow Christ to truly reign in our hearts. May we embrace God's Holy Will in all that we say ... in all that we think ... and in all that we do. So that our minds, our hearts, and our lives may show forth the message of the Gospel ... so that the Peace of God may keep us – always – in the knowledge and love of His Son.