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They Heard Not The Voice Of Peter.

On August 1, 1917, when the Great War was four years old, Pope Benedict XV addressed himself "To the Leaders of the Belligerent Peoples" in a strong plea for peace. As a basis for negotiations to this end, he proposed the following stipulations:

1. That the moral force of right be substituted for the material force of arms, and that armament be reduced to a point consonant with public order;
2. That arbitration, with appropriate penalties, be substituted for armies;
3. That there be true liberty of communication and community of the seas;
4. That there be complete and reciprocal condonation of the damages to be repaired and the war expenses;
5. That occupied territory be restored, and that in the solution of ancient vexed territorial questions, such as those between Italy and Austria, Germany and France, Poland, Armenia, the Balkan States, consideration be had for the aspirations of the peoples involved.

Germany's reply showed respectful interest. President Wilson replied for the Allies. In substance he stated: "The object of this war is to deliver the free peoples of the world from the menace and the actual power of a vast military establishment, controlled by an irresponsible government... This power is not the German people.... We cannot take the word of the present rulers of Germany.... We must await some new evidence of the purposes of the great peoples of the Central Powers."

That closed the incident. The War went on for another fourteen months, its horrors unabated. Then came the revolution of the German people and the downfall of the Kaiser, and Wilson went to Europe to set the world on a new foundation of fourteen points. He was practically a broken man when he returned; he had found that Wilhelm was not the only Kaiser in Europe and that fair promises could be broken by other than German governments. Freedom of the seas was a myth; oil, not popular aspirations, determined new territorial boundaries; might ruled to crush opposition; secret understandings invalidated open promises; suspicions, fears, and hatreds centuries old dictated policies. Greeks slew Turks and threw their bodies over the sea-wall at Smyra while the allied fleet, with the Stars and Stripes at the head, looked to protect Greek occupation... and so on.

"The day of reparations is past," said Benedict. They heeded not. France ripped open the Ruhr and Saar Valleys for coal, and closed the mines of Wales. German factories worked night and day on reparations goods, and shut down English factories. England, to bring back the pound sterling, sold South American exchange for dollars, and wrecked the peso. Finally America found her foreign markets destroyed by the inability of foreign countries to buy. The arable lands opened up by the needs of that last year of war cut in on our markets for grain; Communism, greatly strengthened in Europe by Wilson's appeal to the German people to rid themselves of the Kaiser, took firmer roots in Russia, and the Soviet took to dumping goods to beat down our prices.

Materialism still ruled - night... machinery... the dollar. We were told in the last presidential campaign that we were a greater people than any other because we had more automobiles, more telephones, more radios per capita. Our murders, our broken homes, our strangled babies, our companionate marriages were not mentioned. Neither was our craft. Neither was our fading sense of business honor. Neither was our blasphemy.

The world suffers because it heeded not the voice of Peter, who spoke through Benedict. Peter has spoken again, through Pius. Like the Prodigal Son, God will take us back, and give us our daily bread, if we will do His will. Will we heed this time?