



Second week of Advent

“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

MATTHEW 3: 3

Prepare your heart to turn towards peace

We remember Israel’s hope for the coming of God’s Messiah to save, to forgive, and to restore. We also need a savior and we hope for the second coming of Jesus. Advent is our time to prepare our hearts and our world to welcome him.

Matthew repeats the passage from Isaiah 40:3 to identify John the Baptist as the prophesied predecessor of the Messiah. John was the voice crying in the wilderness with the urgent message to repent – to change the direction of one’s heart – and prepare for the Messiah whose time is at hand.

Any great work of God begins with great preparation. Let’s take the time of Advent to examine the crooked paths in our hearts and seek ways to straighten them.

Let’s also tune our ears to the voices crying in the wilderness. Some of those voices in our contemporary world belong to courageous and hopeful people who are witnesses for peace in places overwhelmed with violence.

The Vatican-sponsored Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome in April 2016 brought together 83 Catholic peacemakers from 31 countries to offer their personal experiences in practicing active nonviolence, often during war and extreme violence.

“I think of the many times in the Gospel when people reached out or called to Jesus for healing,” Maryknoll

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Sister Teresa Hougnon, who has worked with conflict resolution mission teams in East Timor and Kenya, wrote for the conference. “Jesus’ response was never, ‘I have healed you,’ but rather ‘your faith has healed you.’ The solutions to violence are within each one of us. God has given us each insight and understanding, and a will to live nonviolently. We only need the space to voice it.”

“The time has come for our Church to be a living witness,” the Catholic peacemakers at the conference wrote in their closing appeal to the Church, “and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective nonviolent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model.”

The life and teachings of Jesus demonstrate that to turn one’s heart from sin is to turn towards peace. This week in Advent let’s consider ways to listen to voices for peace and make space for responding in our own lives.

Questions for Reflection

What is a crooked path in your heart or in the world that is blocking peace?

Who is a voice in the wilderness calling you to turn toward peace?

Advent Reflection Guide – First Sunday, November 27, 2016

Lighting of the candles

TWO PURPLE CANDLES

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 3: 1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."



"African spirituality is always about relationships. If there's anything Africa has taught me, it is sharing – property, time, food, space. You begin to understand that God has given it to all of us and we have to work out a way to share it."

– FATHER LANCE NADEAU, Kenya
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Prayer

Response: Change our hearts, God of peace.

That we learn compassion ...

That we embrace nonviolence ...

That we be forgiving ...

That we may be filled with mercy ...

That we may act with justice ...

That we live in solidarity with all people and the Earth...

That we be bearers of hope ...

That we trust and risk ...

That we be makers of peace

Response

Pick one or more of the peacemakers who attended the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference and search online to learn more about their stories.

<https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/conference-participants/>

Read and share with your faith community the background papers for the conference.

<https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/framing-papers/>

Read reflections on active nonviolence written by Maryknoll Missioners who attended the conference.

<http://maryknollogc.org/tag/maryknoll-nonviolence-reflections>