



# First week of Advent

"Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come."

MATTHEW 24: 42

## Hope for peace in all things

**E**ven if you know the Advent season well, don't rush past what God is offering to you now. Advent is a time of hopeful waiting. Just as Israel waited in hope for the coming of God's Messiah to save, to forgive, and to restore, we wait in hope for Jesus' return.

Is there any image more hopeful than the light of a single candle overcoming the darkness? The Advent season tells us once again that God has never forgotten humankind. It invites the discouraged, the sore of heart, to rekindle hope.

But how can we act in hope when the reality of our world is overwhelming violence and war, inequality and poverty?

We have the teachings of Jesus to guide us: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." The message of nonviolence is central to Jesus' life and teaching.

This is why the Vatican sponsored the landmark Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome in April 2016. Catholic peacemakers from 31 countries – including some Maryknoll missionaries – discussed their efforts to promote nonviolence, often while facing extreme violence. "Gospel nonviolence is an expression of the infinite goodness of God," Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International, said at the conference. "It is the fundamental goodness of the human person, in spite of violence and injustice."

Jesus teaches us to live the nonviolent life to fulfill our calling as children of the God of peace, who wants the fullness of life for all. Nonviolence is not only a way of

life, but also a positive and powerful force for social change, and a process for transforming conflict while at the same time protecting the vulnerable.

During the four weeks of Advent, we will reflect on what was shared at the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference and remember Isaiah the prophet who envisions a world of peace where swords will be turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, where there will be no more wars – a world of peace!

Jesus sent his disciples to bear witness to this way of life – the way of peace and justice, of compassion, mercy, and love – so he sends us, through the witness of our lives.

The Gospel reading this week calls us to pay attention with hope, to remain vigilant. Jesus, the Messiah, has come, is coming daily into our lives, and will come again.

We invite you to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by knowing and sharing peace. Let's start with prayer to open our eyes to see the humanity in all and open our hearts to mercy and compassion. Only then will our hope overcome doubt and fear and empower us to take risks for peace.

## Questions for Reflection

What issue of violence, whether direct, cultural, or structural, challenges you?

Where do you see signs of hope that violence can be overcome?

# Lighting of the candle

## ONE PURPLE CANDLE

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we look forward with hope to the coming of Christ.

## Gospel reading: MATTHEW 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."



"I have seen the transformative power of restorative justice whether in cases of bullying, the death of a child at a school, or in prison conflicts. Truth, individual and collective responsibility, repair of harm done, and reintegration into the community are key elements to the peace process."

– JOANNE BLANEY  
Maryknoll Lay Missioners  
(Pictured on left, in Brazil)

## Prayer

Recognizing the violence in my own heart,  
yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God,  
I seek to practice the nonviolence of Jesus:

By striving for peace within myself and  
seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;

By refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and  
violence;

By living consciously and simply so that  
I do not deprive others of the means to live;

By actively resisting evil and working  
nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of  
war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and  
believe that you will give me the grace to live out this  
prayer.

-Pax Christi USA

## Response

Pray for someone with whom you have a conflict.

Name a hope you have for yourself, your family, your  
community this Advent. What can you do to make it a  
reality?

Read "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to  
the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence" from the  
Nonviolence and Just Peace conference. Individuals and  
organizations are invited to endorse the appeal.

<http://bit.ly/NVJustPeace2016>