



WORLD DAY OF PEACE

JANUARY 1 2017

UNDERSTANDING POPE FRANCIS' MESSAGE "NONVIOLENCE: A STYLE OF POLITICS FOR PEACE"

The start of the new year finds many people around the world in need of healing from political, economic, and social injustice. In response, Pope Francis offers his 2017 World Day of Peace message on the need for nonviolence as a style of politics. This is the first significant teaching of a pope on nonviolence.

Our broken world

In his message, Pope Francis repeats his observation that "we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal" or world war three "in installments." His message is that active nonviolence is the only sure way to peace:

"Violence is not the cure for our broken world."

Research has shown that countering violence with violence does not lead to sustainable peace. Pope Francis writes that, at best, a world order maintained through violent means leads to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people. "At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all."

Repeating a principle he named in The Joy of the Gospel, the pope asks us to go beyond the surface of a conflict, see others in their "deepest dignity" and "make active nonviolence our way of life."

Jesus' teaching

With striking clarity, Pope Francis declares: "Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come." (Mark 7:21).

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.

"Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation."

Manual for peacemaking

Pope Francis recommends the Sermon on the Mount as a "manual" for peacemaking and challenges all people, particularly political and business leaders, international institutions and legislators to study the Sermon on the Mount and apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities. The eight Beatitudes provide a "portrait of the person we could describe as blessed, good, and authentic."

What nonviolence looks like

Refuting the image of nonviolence as passivity and surrender, the Holy Father declares that history has shown that “the decisive and consistent practice of nonviolence has produced impressive results” and active nonviolence is “more powerful than violence.” Some of the great peacemakers the pope names are:

- **Martin Luther King of the United States** who led the march from Selma to Montgomery fifty years ago as part of the campaign to fulfill his “dream” of full civil and political rights for African Americans. “America continues to be, for many, a land of dreams,” Pope Francis said during his speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress. “Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment. Dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people.”
- **Mother Teresa of Calcutta**, known to many as “the saint of the gutters.” In his homily during the Mass in which Mother Teresa was declared a saint in 2016, Pope Francis said, “She made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime of poverty they created.”
- **Leymah Gbowee of Liberia** and the thousands of her fellow Liberian women whose nonviolent protests and pray-ins led to the peaceful end of the second civil war in Liberia in 2003.
- **Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan**, a Hindu and Muslim, respectively, who led nonviolent civil resistance during India’s struggle for independence.

Nonviolence in the family

Pope Francis notes that the success of active nonviolence begins in the family and in our personal practices that model hope. The family is where we learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, to resolve friction and conflicts “not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the

good of the other, mercy and forgiveness.” The pope emphasizes the need to extend respect for human dignity beyond the family and to our enemy as well.

Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

Pope Francis selected active nonviolence as his theme for this 50th World Day of Peace Message at the request of participants of the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome in April 2016.

More than 80 Catholic practitioners of active nonviolence concluded the conference by issuing an appeal to the Church to become a “living witness” of the nonviolence teachings of Jesus. They urged the Church to move away from the “just war” theory promulgated by Saint Augustine and develop a “just peace” approach. Pax Christi International responded by launching the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative to promote the appeal. Read the appeal at <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/>.

I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.

Faith in action

- **Pray for the Church**, that she may embrace Jesus’ teaching about nonviolence and assist every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.
- **Read the message** with your family and parish. Gather together to ask: How might the Holy Spirit be calling us to be creative and active peacemakers? <http://bit.ly/WorldDayofPeace2017>
- **Share the message widely**, particularly with political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives. Ask them to study the Sermon on the Mount and apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities.