



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS

2016
Advent
REFLECTION GUIDE

A SEASON TO EMBRACE GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE

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*In every age, the Holy Spirit graces the Church with the wisdom to respond to the **challenges of our time**. In response to what is a global epidemic of violence which Pope Francis has labeled a “**world war in installments**,” we are being called to invoke, pray over, teach and take decisive action to **advance Gospel nonviolence**.*

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An appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the
centrality of Gospel nonviolence

About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Gospel reading and the discussion by the 83 Catholic peacemakers who attended the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome in April 2016, as well as the outcome statement of the conference entitled "An appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence." Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and renew your spirit to face the realities of our world. Learn more about the conference and the appeal, and follow the ongoing Catholic Nonviolence Initiative at www.nonviolencejustpeace.net.

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About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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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

Even 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>



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 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?

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>



Third week of Advent

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them."

MATTHEW 11: 4-5

Rejoice, for the Lord is near

There may be moments when we feel paralyzed or defeated by the enormity of violence in the world. We may wish for and even pray for God to intervene in big, dramatic ways. We may wonder why God isn't doing more.

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday John the Baptist instructs his disciples to go ask Jesus, who hadn't toppled the political rulers of Israel or even freed John from jail, if Jesus really is the Messiah. We can almost hear John thinking "If you are the Messiah, then why aren't you doing more?"

Jesus replies by naming what he had done: heal the sick, cure the afflicted, raise the dead, and proclaim good news to the poor. Jesus' power is displayed mostly in humble acts of service, responding to individual needs – not in spectacular displays of political deliverance. This is the way of the Lord in our contemporary world as well: Filled with the Spirit, we serve one another and persist in small actions for justice and mercy.

Bishop Paride Taban spoke at the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference about his experience as a peacemaker in war-torn South Sudan. After being imprisoned and mistreated by rebel forces, Bishop Taban publicly forgave them. "I looked on them just as my mother did on me as a child. I forgave them," he said. "And now for forgiving them all, all of them – the rebels and the government – [show me] love. The only person who can meet both the government and the opposition party is me." ... "That is the way of nonviolence, to be a

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shepherd who loves all the sheep. That's what Jesus has shown us."

Bishop Taban demonstrates that being a peacemaker requires not only perseverance and courage but also creativity and openness. "Nothing is lost when we effectively enter into dialogue," Pope Francis said in Assisi last September. "Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace."

The peacemakers at the conference in Rome have sent an appeal to Pope Francis that includes a request for an encyclical on nonviolence and Just Peace, to call the entire world to build cultures of nonviolence. They also ask the Church to integrate nonviolence into its life and work at every level and to promote nonviolent practices, such as "nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding strategies" throughout the world.

Faced with the crisis of violence, we need to be transformed and transformational. Advent shows us that we can do so with joy because the Lord is near. We light a pink candle this week, to symbolize our joy.

Questions for Reflection

What gives you joy during this Advent season?

What can you do to be an artisan for peace?

Advent Reflection Guide – Third Sunday, December 11, 2016

Lighting of the Candle

TWO PURPLE AND ONE PINK CANDLE

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we rejoice in the coming of our savior.

Gospel Reading: MATTHEW 11:2-11

When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.' Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Prayer

Prepare our hearts, O Lord, and remove the sadness that hinders us from knowing the joy and hope which only your presence can give. We lift our hearts and say:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all, for the Lord is near at hand; have no anxiety about anything, but in all things, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. Lord, you have blessed your land; you have turned away the captivity of Jacob."

(Philippians 4:4-6, Entrance Antiphon for the Third Sunday of Advent)



"The work in Bangladesh is concerned with the whole world: Namely, the world will have peace only when there is peace between religions. To serve the poor and live with them is peacebuilding."

– FATHER ROBERT McCAHILL
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
(Pictured on left, in Bangladesh)

Response

Take time this week to live joyfully. Smile and laugh more; be intentional about your thoughts and refocus when necessary; count your blessings and be thankful.

Name ways you can bring joy to someone who needs encouragement to persevere, and do it!

Name a social problem that moves you to want to make a difference. Is there a person or group that you can ask to help you get involved?

Watch videos and read transcripts of the testimonies of the peacemakers at the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference, in particular Pietro Ameglio from Mexico, Jesuit Father Francisco de Roux from Colombia, Maria Stephan from the U.S. Institute of Peace, and Lisa Sowle Cahill from Boston College.

<https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/videos-nonviolence-conference-fishbowl-sessions/>



Fourth week of Advent

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us.'"

MATTHEW 1: 22-23

Trust in God's peace

Finally, in the fourth week of Advent, the Gospel reading begins our reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation – how it is that the Messiah came to be with us. The Gospel of Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Joseph's perspective. The way that Joseph and Mary face the difficult circumstances of the birth of Jesus tells us about their faith in God.

Joseph follows the instructions of the angel who comes to him in a dream to not be afraid. Joseph and Mary both trust in God's plan for them even though they cannot see what will become of them.

To harness the power of love and conquer violence, we need courage and faith like that of Joseph and Mary. This was illustrated at the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in the testimony of Jesuit Father Francisco de Roux where he described his 14 years of peacebuilding work in the war zone of Colombia.

"We understood that Jesus' peace goes together with unavoidable opposition and violence," said Father Francisco, explaining that in the course of their efforts 24 of his team members were assassinated by the paramilitaries and three killed by the guerrillas. "Nevertheless, we kept looking for peace ... talking with the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the army, trying to demonstrate that there was a way to work together, if we took the risk of opening ourselves up to human dignity, present in each and every one of us."

When voters in Colombia rejected a peace agreement in October, Father Francisco said he had not lost hope for www.maryknollogc.org

peace. "The result of the referendum may be the way that leads us to overcome the deepest of our problems – namely, ourselves," he said. "This is the time to listen to one another."

By adopting a posture of curiosity and openness, Father Francisco demonstrates the power of creative nonviolence: When we strive to understand the suffering of the other person, compassion arises and transforms into action.

"The phrase 'Christian peacemakers' ought to be redundant," Rose Marie Berger of Sojourners wrote in a background paper for the conference. "For Christians, Jesus is the incarnation of God's shalom and the manifestation of just peace. Many Christians, by the very nature of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, prioritize peace with justice and reject violence as a means toward peace, recognizing it as a failure."

The life and teaching of Jesus give us an awareness of the dignity of all life and alters our relationship to oppressors and the oppressed.

Questions for Reflection

Are there relationships in your life that are in need of reconciliation, peace and mercy?

Who is an example of a Christian peacemaker in your life?

Lighting the candles

THREE PURPLE, ONE WHITE CANDLE

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we trust in the coming of the Messiah.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 1: 18-24

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Prayer

Dear God, the harvest is plenty and the laborers are few.
Your people long for peace,
they thirst for justice.
Send into our midst women and men
whose hearts can embrace the entire world.
Send into our midst young and old,
from all your beloved cultures and races,
Who offer their arms to lift up the lowly and oppressed.
Send into our midst new peacemakers
Who will walk with the powerless,
as well as those in power
To proclaim your teaching and
To witness against hate, greed, fear and strife.
Create us anew as your peacemakers, O God,
And send us your peace.
—"Prayer for Vocations to Peacemaking" by Pax Christi
www.maryknollogc.org



"Where do we need to invest our energy in nonviolence as a church? Let us start with ourselves – to look at ourselves and all the violence within us that is denied and suppressed. Denial and refusal to admit, accept and own our violent tendencies because of our privilege and rank force others with less privilege and rank to deal with our share of the burden."

—SISTER GIANG NGUYEN

Maryknoll Sisters

(Pictured left to right: Maryknoll Sisters Giang Nguyen, Sia Temu and Teresa Houghon, in Kenya. Together they serve on the Maryknoll Sisters peace-building team in Africa. Since 2006, they have worked to facilitate relationships among culturally diverse people and explore peaceful means of co-existence. They themselves are from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds. They believe in the African proverb "Peace is costly but it is worth the expense." Photo courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters.

Response

Name an opportunity you have in your church or community to be peacemaker.

Sign up for our email listserv, to receive our newsletter and action alerts about issues of peace and justice.

www.maryknollogc.org

Read the response from the organizers of the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference to concerns that their appeal to the Church to recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence is an "embrace of pacifism."

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/57ec6282e4b0972364deab50>

Advent Reflection Guide – Fourth Sunday, December 18, 2016