

## **Prayer for the Beginning of the 40-Day Fast for Nonviolence July 1, 2022**

**Introduction:** Jesus and the early church stated clearly that violence is not the Christian way, that violence is not the Apostolic way, that violence is not the way of God. Yet, since the Third Century, most Christians have not proclaimed this message. It is because of this tragic and shameful reality that Pax Christi New York State is joining with others around the country to fast for Christian nonviolence. The fast is a response to and a prayerful protest against the culture of violence that plagues our society. It is also a commitment to peacemaking in our everyday lives.

This year, in a special way, we fast to end the war in Ukraine and all the civil wars, terrorist insurgencies, drug wars, ethnic violence, and political unrest in 21 additional countries from Afghanistan to Yemen where from approximately 1,000 to over 10,000 casualties have occurred according to the World Population Review. We also fast to end gun violence and hate crimes in places like the U.S. and violent occupations in places like Palestine. And not to be forgotten are the lingering pandemic, poverty, all those isms, and environmental crises.

And, of course, we fast to abolish nuclear weapons and to urge the U.S. and all nuclear-weapons states to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The fast begins on July 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on August 9<sup>th</sup>, a very somber anniversary. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, St. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) was killed at Auschwitz, Blessed Franz Jaegerstaetter was beheaded for refusing to serve in Hitler's army, and the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, the largest and oldest Christian community in Japan, killing 140,000 people and destroying the city.

This fast for nonviolence begins in prayer, because we know that prayer and fasting are fundamental forces for good in all faith traditions. In the Christian tradition, St. John Paul II wrote:

Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil. As he taught His disciples, "Some demons cannot be driven out except in this way" (Matt. 17:21, Mark 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit; the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love. (*Evangelism Vitae*, #100)

And so we pray.

### **Opening Prayer**

Come Holy Spirit; fill us with a new heart: a heart that takes in all people from every corner of this earth, a heart that recognizes that we are all sisters and brothers whose home is the earth. Guide our prayer and fasting as we strive to become witnesses and instruments of peace.

## **Reader 1**

We live in a time of tremendous suffering, widespread trauma and fear linked to militarization, economic injustice, climate change and other forms of violence. In this context of systemic violence, we are called to recognize the centrality of active nonviolence in the vision and message of Jesus . . . and to recognize our long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet.

### **A Prayer for Bread Not Stones** *by Tom Cordaro*

God of Liberation from all our foreboding,  
our children ask for bread but are fed the poison of fear.  
We put guns in their hands and tell them,  
this is the way to safety, power, respect, and salvation.

We give lip-service to your call to love without cost  
and to show compassion without distinctions,  
but we are quick to abandon your teachings  
when we are told to fear and despise those who are not like us.

We have abandoned your promise of abundant life  
in exchange for the promise of longevity through overwhelming firepower.

Give us the wisdom to embrace the things that make for peace:  
Help us to understand that we live in a world of endless wonder  
that needs to be cared for and treasured;  
Help us to see that we live in a world of bounty that belongs to the whole human family, without  
excluding or favoring anyone;  
from each, according to their ability, and to each, according to their needs;  
Help us understand that our security lies in the strength of our solidarity with all – even those who  
are marked as enemies.

Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to the truth that we are only safe and secure when everyone is safe  
and secure; that we will be at peace only when justice rolls on like a river, protecting the dignity of  
every person and embracing every creature. . . Amen.

### **A Reading from the Gospel of Mark 12:28-30**

One of the scribes asked Jesus, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! God is God alone! You shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

### **Prayer for Disarmament from Pax Christi USA**

O God of life,  
Hear our prayers and petitions for peace,  
in these times of chaos and fear.  
You, who have endowed us with the capacity  
for love, compassion and generosity,

lead us toward global harmony and nonviolence,  
away from the false security of war, violence  
and nuclear weapons,  
away from the holocaust of the human race and  
massive global destruction.

Through your eternal grace  
inspire our voices to call for the dismantling of  
nuclear factories and bombs of death,  
inspire our hearts with the desire and intention for  
global nuclear disarmament,  
and transform our spirits into peacemakers of Christ,  
for "Blessed are the peacemakers."  
Amen

### **A Reading from Thomas Merton**

In 1949, early in the cold war with Russia, the monk and poet Thomas Merton wrote, "When I pray for peace, I pray God to pacify not only the Russians and the Chinese but above all my own nation and myself. When I pray for peace, I pray to be protected not only from the Reds but also from the folly and blindness of my own country. When I pray for peace, I pray not only that the enemies of my country may cease to want war, but above all that my own country will cease to do the things that make war inevitable. In other words, when I pray for peace, I am not just praying that the Russians will give up without a struggle and let us have our own way. I am praying that both we and the Russians may somehow be restored to sanity and learn how to work out our problems, as best we can, together, instead of preparing for global suicide."

Seventy-three years later, let this be our prayer as well—for the U.S., Russia, China, and all the world in conflict.

### **A Litany to the God of Justice** from Iona Abbey Service for Justice and Peace

The response is: *God of Justice, show yourself.*

If we have driven a wedge between piety and peacemaking, erected a wall between prayer and politics, associated the purposes of heaven with only the gentler things of earth, then we pray....

If we have offered to false gods the devotion you alone deserve, if we have dismissed the Gospel as irrelevant to the world, then we pray....

If we have dumbed down your Word and domesticated your spirit because we wanted an easier faith and a tamer dove, then we pray....

Whenever in our nations the poor are endangered, the sick are neglected, prisoners are refused redemption, and strangers among us are suspected, we pray ....

Wherever in our world the lust for profit undermines the longing for peace, or the greed for power overrides the need for fairness, we pray...

In the prison visitor and the mediator, in vigils for peace and protests to protect the earth, to all who fear for the future of children, to those who long for a different day, we pray....

May God our maker bless us and wrap us round in love and tenderness.

May Jesus our brother bless us and ask us the questions that lead us to do justice.

May the Holy Spirit bless us and fill our lives with her courage and wisdom. Amen.

### **Statement of Commitment**

Aware of our responsibility as disciples of Jesus, we commit to:

- Live the call to Gospel nonviolence in our homes and communities
- Promote nonviolent practices and strategies in our lives, our ministries and our world
- Continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons
- Support and defend those nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.
- Protect the earth to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.

**And we pray,** Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us, sinners that we are. We accept the call to repent and to return to the truth that violence is not the Christian way, that violence is not the way of Jesus. As a response to that call, we join together in this fast for Gospel nonviolence.

### **Closing prayer**

God of love beyond measure, we hear your call to open our arms wide to let the suffering of the world come into our lives. Your call both frightens and invites us. We cannot remain passive in the midst of the challenge. We desire to live your love with total abandon without counting the cost or the reward. We long to be people who care deeply for each of your precious creatures and who choose to make a difference where we can. Give us the strength and wisdom; we pray to enter this unending dance of love every day, every hour, every moment, everywhere. Amen.

(Opening Prayer, First Reading, Statement of Commitment, and Closing Prayer adopted and adapted from a prayer service prepared by Sr. Catherine Arata, SSND for the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative: A Project of Pax Christi International, [www.nonviolencejustpeace.net](http://www.nonviolencejustpeace.net); [www.paxchristi.net](http://www.paxchristi.net))