

Prayer for the Beginning of the 40-Day Fast for Gospel Nonviolence July 1, 2024

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 wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, the gang violence in Haiti, and all the other civil wars, terrorist insurgencies, drug wars, ethnic violence, and political unrest across the globe. We also fast to end gun violence and hate crimes in the U.S. and beyond. And not to be forgotten are the poverty, all the 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 1st and ends on August 9th, a very somber anniversary. On August 9th, 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

May the God of peace hear our prayers, turn us into people of Gospel nonviolence, and strengthen us to go forward in a campaign of public nonviolence to work for an end to war, poverty, racism, nuclear weapons, and environmental destruction, and for the coming of a new culture of peace and nonviolence. May they inspire us to pursue our intimate relationship with our beloved God that we might become friends of God, that we might listen to God, and that we might go forth to do God's work of peace, love, and nonviolence. Amen.

~~from *Radical Prayers on Peace, Love & Nonviolence* by John Dear

Psalm 85:8

I will listen for the word of God; surely God will proclaim peace to the people, to the faithful, to those who trust in God.

Prayer for World Peace

Great God...give us the strength it takes to listen rather than to judge, to trust rather than to fear, to try again and again to make peace even when peace eludes us.

We ask, O God, for the grace to be our best selves. We ask for the vision to be builders of the human community rather than its destroyers. We ask for the humility as a people to understand the fears and hopes of other peoples. We ask for the love it takes to bequeath to the children of the world to become more than the failures of our own making...

Give us the depth of soul, O God, to constrain our might, to resist the temptations of power, to refuse to attack the attackable, to understand that vengeance begets violence, and to bring peace—not war—wherever we go. For you, O God, have been merciful to us. For you, O God, have been patient with us. For you, O God, have been gracious to us. And so may we be merciful and patient and gracious and trusting with these others whom you also love. This we ask through Jesus, the One without vengeance in his heart. This we ask forever and ever. Amen.

~~from Pax Christi USA by Joan Chittister, OSB

Reading from Thich Nhat Hanh

Responding to violence with violence resolves nothing; it only escalates violence, anger and hatred. It is only with compassion that we can embrace and disintegrate violence. This is true in relationships between individuals as well as in relationships between nations. What needs to be done right now is to recognize the suffering, to embrace it and to understand it. By understanding the nature and the causes of the suffering, we will then know the right path to follow...

The violence and hatred we presently face has been created by misunderstanding, injustice, discrimination and despair. We are all co-responsible for the making of violence and despair in the world by our way of living, of consuming and of handling the problems of the world...

In this moment we invite our spiritual teachers...to be with us, to support us so that we can hold in our arms...the suffering of humanity as a family, the suffering of the earth as a home for all of us. We need their energy so that we can become lucid and calm, so that we will know exactly what to do and what not to do...

If we look and listen deeply we can see that when we pray for the victims, we must also pray for the attackers. They are also victims of confusion and violence. If a nation wants to be safe and secure, it has to help other nations, other peoples, feel safe and secure. An act of forgiveness and compassion can bring great relief to the world right now. Such an act could be a statement of the willingness to embrace all suffering inside and outside a nation, to look deeply in order to understand better the cause of the suffering and to act according to that insight.

Litany for Peace

For the world that knows too much of war, for the organizations that work for peace where peace seems unattainable, for wisdom and courage for all political leaders and their peoples, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

For all people of faith, for peace between different religions, for peace among those who share the same faith, for reconciliation and healing that will lead us to unity, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

For a ceaseless desire to seek peace, for an end to believing easy lies about others, for vision to see beyond national vanity, for the courage to question, to think and to reflect, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

For leaders of nations and churches, for the end of discord born of religion, for no more strife in the name of God, for the reign of peaceful justice in their hearts, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

For the misplaced belief in the lasting power of armaments to cease, for the selflessness to admit our wrongs, for the courage to seek reconciliation, for an end to war, an end to violence, and an end to all that divides your children, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

For all who are affected by our choices, for the poor and the voiceless, for those living in war-torn countries, for those who are unjustly incarcerated without legal counsel, we pray:

May we plant seeds of hope and of peace, O God.

~~from *Praying for Peace around the Globe* by James McGinnis

A Reading from Pope Francis

Brothers and sisters, war does not solve any problem: It sows only death and destruction foments hate, proliferates revenge. War cancels out the future; it cancels out the future. I urge believers to take just one side...that of peace. But not in words—in prayer, with total dedication.

Closing Prayer

Dear God,

In the end, there is only one prayer: please convert the entire human race to Jesus's way of total nonviolence.

That is our only hope. This is Jesus's daily prayer. This is the will of the Holy Spirit. This is your deepest desire. Convert us all to the Way, the Truth, and the Life of active, loving nonviolence.

Help us to turn to you, our Higher Power; to renounce violence; to make amends for our long history of violence; and to become sober people of nonviolence, that from now on, we might live within the boundaries of nonviolence—and do no harm to anyone ever again. Instead, may we love, serve, and make peace with all our sisters and brothers around the world from now on.

Give us a new grace: may we never again support the taking of a single human life, no matter what the cause, no matter what we are told.

May we never harm or kill another person, threaten entire peoples, wage war, or terrify the world with the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

May we beat our swords, guns, and bombs into plowshares of peace, and never study war again.

May we abolish war, guns, and nuclear weapons, and learn by heart your methodology of nonviolent conflict resolution, universal love and Gospel peacemaking.

Help us to study peace and build grassroots movements of disarmament, justice, and nonviolence. Help us to institutionalize nonviolent conflict resolution locally, nationally, and globally and to create new structures for new cultures of peace and nonviolence.

Our future is a future of peace and nonviolence. Help us to envision that new future, that new world, that new hope. Give us the grace to do our part to make that vision of peace come true...

Make us as nonviolent as Jesus. Amen.

~~from *Radical Prayers on Peace, Love & Nonviolence* by John Dear

Statement of Commitment for all who are fasting in whatever way works for you:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner. I 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, I will join my sisters and brothers in fasting on _____. (Please fill in when you will be fasting and be sure to send that information to nypaxchristi@gmail.com. Thank you.)

Final Notes:

There are many opportunities to commemorate the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945 and to call for an end to all nuclear weapons. Just three happening in New York City are below. Keep an eye on the Events page of Pax Christi New York State for updates; go to www.paxchristinys.org. In addition, there will be a **Prayer for the Ending of the 40-Day Fast for Gospel Nonviolence** on August 9th, available like this one via e-mail.

- 1) On Saturday, August 3rd, Pax Christi Metro New York will have its Memorial in Union Square starting at 12:30 PM by the Gandhi Statue in the southwest corner of the park.
- 2) On August 4th, our colleagues at War Resisters League will host its Memorial in Tompkins Square Park from noon to 5 PM
- 3) On August 5th, we'll be joining the Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World outside the Japanese Consulate, 299 Park Ave, at noon.