

Prayer for the Beginning of the 40-Day Fast for Gospel Nonviolence July 1, 2026

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. Today, wars rage between Ukraine and Russia, in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar. Israel has all but destroyed Gaza and is extending its assault into the Occupied West Bank. It is also attacking Lebanon and Iran all under the guise of self-defense, and all with the financial, military, and diplomatic support of the U.S. at the U.N. In addition, tensions between the U.S. and China persist. In short, on-going wars and violent conflicts across the globe are epidemic, and the U.S. has its hand in many, if not most, of them. While claiming no money for universal health care, living wages, affordable housing, free higher education, and other life-sustaining needs, the U.S. is pouring billions into provoking, supplying, and engaging in military exercises. Gun rights surpass human rights for those who make the laws and those who oppose even modest gun control. The environment is subject to attack, along with anyone who looks different, sounds different, believes different, or lives different from the mainstream. The list could go on and on. In addition, our media, entertainment, and language are filled with violence; and our country would rather retain the capability to annihilate millions of years of evolution and thousands of years of history with nuclear weapons than sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

It is because of this tragic and shameful reality that this 40-Day Fast is being undertaken. It is a call to the individual Christian--and nonChristians in solidarity with us--to repent and return to the truth that violence is not the way to resolve our conflicts.

The fast begins on July 1st and ends on August 9th, a very somber anniversary. On August 9th, 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. As Thomas Merton wrote:

Prayer and sacrifice must be used as the most effective spiritual weapons in the war against war, and like all weapons, they must be used with deliberate aim: not just with a vague aspiration for peace and security, but against violence and war. This implies that we are also willing to sacrifice and restrain our own instinct for violence and aggressiveness in our relations with other people. We may never succeed in this campaign, but whether we succeed or not, the duty is evident.

And so we pray and so we fast in whatever way we are able as a sacrifice for peace.

Opening Prayer adapted and excerpted from “Bearing Witness to Peace” in *Prayers without Borders: Celebrating Global Wisdom* from Catholic Relief Services

Merciful God, we come to you in our need. Create in us an awareness of the massive forces that threaten our world today. Give us a sense of urgency to activate the forces of goodness, of justice, of love, and of peace....

Teach us your spirit. Only in loving imitation of you can we discover the healing springs of life that will bring new birth to our world. Amen.

A Reading excerpted from “The Message of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the LIV World Day of Peace,” 1st January 2026

Dear brothers and sisters, whether we have the gift of faith or feel we lack it, let us open ourselves to peace! Let us welcome it and recognize it, rather than believing it to be impossible and beyond our reach. Peace is more than just a goal; it is a presence and a journey. Even when it is endangered within us and around us, like a small flame threatened by a storm, we must protect it, never forgetting the names and stories of those who have borne witness to it. Peace is a principle that guides and defines our choices. Even in places where only rubble remains, and despair seems inevitable, we still find people who have not forgotten peace. Just as on the evening of Easter Jesus entered the place where his disciples were gathered in fear and discouragement, so too the peace of the risen Christ continues to pass through doors and barriers in the voices and faces of his witnesses. This gift enables us to remember goodness, to recognize it as victorious, to choose it again, and to do so together.

Response excerpted from “*A Litany of Peacemakers*” in *The Fire of Peace: A Prayer Book* published by Pax Christi USA

God, creator of the universe, author of our covenant of peace, we pray to you, empower us.

God, redeemer of the world, our way of peace, we pray to you, empower us.

God, sanctifier of conscience, gift of peace, we pray to you, empower us.

Mary, wellspring of reconciliation, mother of peacemakers, pray for us.

Moses and Miriam, nonviolent liberators, architects and singers of the covenant of justice, pray for us.

Peter and Paul, prisoners of conscience, pray for us.

Martin of Tours, conscientious objector, pray for us.

Gandhi, Mahatma, nonviolent warrior, pray for us.

Franz Jaegerstaetter, resister for Christ, pray for us.

Martin Luther King, Jr., prophet and dreamer of the Beloved Community, pray for us.

Dorothy Day, lady poverty, mother courage, witness to the radical gospel of peace, pray for us.

Children of light, transfigured in the fire-storms of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, pray for us.

All holy peacemakers, living and more living, pray for us.

Jesus, Messiah, Prince of Peace, we pray to you, empower us.

A Reading excerpted from “**Woman-Pain to Woman-Vision**” by Anne McGrew Bennett, edited by Mary E. Hunt in *Peace Liturgies*

Our very structure of politics is suspect. Decades of official violence and aggression have erupted into personal criminality and brutality. Many citizens, young and old, are withdrawing into a private life-style, rejecting responsibility for the larger world. And the cost of past wars and the ever-escalating military budget impoverishes all of us and our common life. Our cities are falling apart. Essential, vital public services are eliminated. Unemployment, underemployment is staggering. We know the truth of Benjamin Franklin's warning in 1784: the military "is a devouring monster."

Let us, [instead], commit ourselves to the idea of a global community with policies of peace and justice for all people so that our endangered human species may be saved, the earth preserved, and humankind may know the fullness of life for which all were created.

Prayer Response from the Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace

O God, you bless Peacemakers of every age. Give us the courage to keep the vision of *PEACE* with *JUSTICE* alive in our hearts and in the here and now of our conflict-ridden World. Send your Holy Spirit to breathe into us the trust and confidence that heals and seeks reconciliation. Activate our imaginations that we may create alternatives to violence, making our good Earth a place of *PEACE* for all of her people. Amen.

A Reading from the First Letter of Peter 3:8-9

In summary, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Closing Prayer excerpted from "In Your Universal Compassion and Mercy, Everyone is Redeemable" in *Radical Prayers: On Peace, Love & Nonviolence* by Fr. John Dear

Dear God, in your infinite compassion and mercy, you reach out with love toward every human being. Help us to show your compassion and mercy widely...

May we institutionalize compassion and inclusivity that war and killings might cease, and equality and justice become the norm, that we can create new cultures of peace, compassion, and nonviolence. Amen.

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 two 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 Sunday, August 2nd, we'll be joining the Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World on the steps of the New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue and 41st Street at 2 PM to repent of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons.
- 2) On Sunday, August 9th, we will join our colleagues from War Resisters League for a Memorial in Tompkins Square Park from noon to 5 PM. At 1:30 PM, Pax Christi will offer a commemorative ritual of prayer, music, a procession around the park, the distribution of a flier with information and action suggestions, and the ringing of a gong 81 times for the 81 years since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Also, in the spirit of Gospel Nonviolence, please spread the word about the Ben Salmon No Just War Catholic Conscientious Objection Registry for 16 to 35 year old men and women. Direct people to the Pax Christi USA website with all the information:

<https://paxchristiusa.org/2025/06/18/pax-christi-usa-announces-conscientious-objection-registry/>.

And please note that there is now a scholarship for anyone who registers. Donations to PCUSA, with designation that your donation is specifically for the CO scholarship, are most welcome.

