

Lent 2023

Reflection

***“So then, let us not fall asleep as others do,
but let us keep awake and be sober.” (Thess. 5:6)***

Pope Francis quoted these words of St. Paul in his 2023 World Day of Peace Message. He was emphasizing “an invitation to remain alert and not to withdraw into fear, sorrow, or resignation or to yield to distraction or discouragement,” but instead “to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God,”...“keeping watch and ready to glimpse the first light of dawn, even at the darkest hour.” Pope Francis added that we must do this in solidarity with one another, because that is the way to “build peace, ensure justice, and emerge from the greatest disasters.”

Today, we are facing one of those “greatest disasters,” the war in Ukraine, which risks escalating into nuclear war. Reuters reports that Americans have been told to leave Russia. Poland is calling up over 200,000 men for military training, and NATO now has 10 times the number of their troops on Russian borders than last year. Tanks, planes, missiles, and drones flood Ukraine. One hundred Ukrainians are doing Patriot missile training in Oklahoma. Pope Francis rightly tells us it is time to “transform our customary criteria for viewing the world around us.” Rather, “we must think in terms of the common good, recognizing that we belong to a greater community” and that “the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected.”

It is time for us to change directions, especially as we enter the journey which is Lent. In this year’s Lenten Message, Pope Francis proposes two paths for us to follow, based on Jesus’s Transfiguration.

The first path leads us up the mountain where we hear God’s command to “Listen to him.” How do we listen to Jesus? Do we take seriously his commands to love our neighbor as ourselves, knowing that *all* are our neighbors, and to love our enemies, even Russians and Chinese? Are we willing to trust God more than we trust governments to lay down our arms, to stop the flow of weapons, to negotiate peace. In short, are we willing to press for peace in the name of the nonviolent Jesus? How well do we listen?

The second path takes us down the mountain where we are to face “reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions” without fear, because that is the way to Easter. Just as Jesus experienced the passion and cross graced with faith, hope, and love, we, too, can anticipate similar grace to conquer fear and build peace.

The questions remain before us: Will we use this Lent to enter this journey? Will we keep awake and be sober to “glimpse the first light of dawn, even at the darkest hour”? Are we ready to “build peace, ensure justice, and emerge from the greatest disasters”?

Prayer

O most gracious God, in the plan of your infinite wisdom you have asked us to work fervently for peace. In the midst of a world filled with conflicts, rage, and hostility, your command to us is: “Seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11b). Your son, Jesus, gave us his farewell gift of peace and asked us to make it a reality in our world. Such is our desire, but the obstacles are great. We need your help and your grace to make peace happen. As we journey through Lent, we plead for your assistance and we pledge ourselves anew to be peacemakers in this torn world of ours. We ask this through Christ our Savior. Amen.
(adapted from *Stations of the Cross for Peace* by Matthias Neuman, OSB, Liguori Publications, 2005)

Suggested Actions:

Please spend some time with this reflection.

Read the complete World Day of Peace Message of Pope Francis at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20221208-messaggio-56giornatamondiale-pace2023.html>

Read the complete Lenten Message of Pope Francis at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/20230125-messaggio-quaresima.html>.

Stay informed about current events and join with others to help reverse the causes of war like poverty, racism, environmental destruction, greed, and power lust.

Phone, write, and petition the President and Congress; join a rally; and pray for peace in Ukraine and all the other places where conflicts are tearing this world apart.

Join the 41st Good Friday Way of the Cross organized by Pax Christi Metro New York (PCMNY) on April 7th beginning at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, E. 47th St. between 1st and 2nd Avenues at 8:30 AM.

Stay in touch with Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi New York State by visiting our websites and Facebook pages periodically (www.paxchristiusa.org and www.paxchristinys.org).

Share this reflection with others.