



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

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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
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"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 Hougnon, 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.

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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>

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