

**Saturday, November 1 – All Saints**  
*Prepared by Fr. Joseph Healey, MM, Nairobi, Kenya*

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14 • Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 • First John 3:1-3 • Matthew 5:1-12

During the post election violence in Kenya in the first part of 2008 a Catholic woman in a St. Paul Chaplaincy Center Prayer Group in Nairobi said, “I am a Christian first, a Kenyan second and a Kikuyu third.” This open spirit dramatizes Kenya’s long road back to peace and reconciliation following months of tribalism and negative ethnicity. It highlights a key verse in today’s Gospel: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.” Overall the Beatitudes in St. Matthew’s Gospel depict the human attitudes necessary for seeking the justice of the Kingdom of God.

Only three days remain before our local and national elections here in the United States. We are challenged to vote wisely and well. There are important international issues for the future of our nation and our world. A key issue is world peace and global security. Have we studied carefully the candidates’ positions and policy proposals on these burning questions?

1. What is your plan for U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan?
2. How would you contribute to a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
3. What would you do to ensure the integrity of existing treaties and promote cooperative approaches to peace and security through the UN and other organizations?
4. How would you restructure the federal budget to promote sustainable security for neighborhoods and communities at home and abroad?
5. How would you use U.S. power for preventive diplomacy and nonviolent conflict resolution?

It is significant in the list of Beatitudes that the peacemakers are called children of God (Matthew 5:9). What greater gift could we have -- to be sons and daughters of God and call God “Abba”? This is closely related to today’s second reading: “See what love God has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” (1 John 3:1) If we truly live as God’s children then we love each other, we forgive each other, and we serve each other.

In March 2008, during a meeting of the St. Jude South Small Christian Community (SCC) near the main highway going to Uganda in Yala Parish in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya, the members reflected on the Gospel passage from John 20:23: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Speaking from his heart, one Luo man emotionally asked the SCC members to pray for him to forgive President Mwai Kibaki. He said that every time he saw the Kikuyu president on TV he got upset and angry and so he needed healing. The other SCC members were deeply touched and feelingly prayed for him. The Kenyan man said that he felt peaceful again.

On this All Saints Day we have “so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) – canonized saints and other prophetic holy people – who inspire us to work for reconciliation, justice and peace. Today and everyday let us be conscious of people like St. Francis Assisi, St. Paul (this year we are celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of his birth), Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Thomas Merton, Oscar Romero and Desmond Tutu.

We want to elect leaders in the United States who are aware of, and sensitive to, the major challenges in Africa such as war, poverty, humanitarian assistance, human rights, economic justice, debt cancellation, international trade, HIV/AIDS (funding for PEPFAR), corruption, malaria and the harmful goals of the establishment of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Some specific African resources on world peace to widen our horizons:

1. African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories ([www.afriprov.org](http://www.afriprov.org)) publishes many African proverbs, sayings and stories on reconciliation, justice and peace; includes the “African Proverb of the Month” and an online, searchable database.

2. “Blessed Are the Peacemakers.” DVD. 27 minutes. June 2008. Highlights the efforts of some of the organizations working for peace in Kenya and beyond. Very timely in light of the post election violence in Kenya and the pressing need for reconciliation, justice and peace. Order from Ukweli Video Productions, Nairobi, Kenya, [www.ukwelivideo.com](http://www.ukwelivideo.com)

3. Africa Faith & Justice Network: [www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org)

4. People for Peace in Africa newsletter: [ppa@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:ppa@africaonline.co.ke)

5. Use symbols to promote reconciliation and peacebuilding: In this unique time in the turbulent history of Africa, symbols are important to heal the divisions between and within ethnic groups. These symbols can be used in meetings and prayer services. First are the universal symbols such as a white dove, olive branch, white flag, handshake, food and drink. Second are particular national symbols. In Kenya these include the national flag, the national anthem, a map of Kenya and the Swahili word *harambee* (“let us pull together.”) Third are specific African cultural symbols of forgiveness, reconciliation and peacemaking of individual ethnic groups with their own local languages, customs and traditions. For example, the Acholi people in Uganda drink a bitter root and step on an egg (the *mato oput* ceremony).

Some practical things that you can celebrate in masses and prayer services to emphasize that we belong to a world church and live in global village:

1. During the “Our Father ” substitute “food” for “bread” as in “Give us this day our daily food ...” Many African languages do not have a word for bread. The staple is corn meal or unsweetened bananas or yams. In much of Asia people eat rice. Also this symbolizes our solidarity with hungry and starving people around the world.

2. Use local signs of peace. For example, the sign in Sudan and Sierra Leone: Place one’s right hand on the left shoulder of the other person and say “peace” in one’s home language/mother tongue.

3. Our Eucharistic liturgy concludes with the words, “The Mass is ended. Go in peace ... Thanks be to God.” But in reality the mass is just beginning because our liturgy flows into our daily lives. There is a saying: *When you go down from the altar of sacrifice bring not the ashes but the fire.* So think of the idea that the Mass is just beginning.

Let us be more conscious of being peacebuilders, peacemakers in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth. Looking towards the future recall that the United Nations has designated the year 2009 as the “World Year of Reconciliation” and the theme of the Second African Synod to take place in Rome from October 4-25, 2009 is “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.”

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Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world.” Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change. Email ([ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)) for a copy, or find the election guide here: [www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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