



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

2022

Advent

REFLECTION GUIDE
LIVING GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE

“

May we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home.

”

Pope Francis

About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Gospel reading. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

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About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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First week of Advent

“Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.”

MATTHEW 24:42

Hope for peace in all things

We are waiting, constantly waiting. Waiting for the birth of Christ. Waiting for the Messiah to return. Often, and particularly during this Advent season, we light a candle to mark our waiting. A light in the darkness is a symbol of hope. Indeed, in Spanish, waiting and hoping are the same word.

Hope implies something unrealized – a “not yet.” The candle is a light in the darkness, yet the darkness remains. Candlelight does not banish all darkness. Christ will, eventually. But as we wait, winter envelops us, the days grow shorter, nights longer. The candlelight offers only a glimpse of what is to come – a beacon in the persistent dark.

Darkness and violence often threaten to overcome our world. War, climate disaster, staggering food insecurity, all leading to unprecedented numbers of people on the move. Lies and division make solutions elusive. Nonviolence is the light that shines in the darkness.

In the corners of the world where we light the flame of nonviolence, it proves surprisingly capable of driving out darkness. Studies show strategic, active nonviolence to be strikingly effective at preventing, transforming, and healing from violence. And yet so many in the world pursue more violence, even as a purported means to achieve peace. The violence of weapons. Violence against our common home. The violence of exclusion, discrimination, and indifference.

Only Christ will ever completely overcome violence in the world. But, like the candles in the Advent wreath, we are called to be signs of Christ’s gospel nonviolence on Earth. We are called to keep the flame alight no matter how much darkness surrounds us.

Nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life, and an ethical framework to guide our actions. It is, as Pope Francis called it, “a style of politics for peace.” It involves integral disarmament: disarming ourselves, internally and spiritually, letting go of the violence in our hearts in order to then disarm the world. We must build the conditions for peace. We must confront and resist violence with agape love. We must be always open to dialogue, even with our enemies. We must refuse revenge, and instead seek healing and reconciliation.

By fostering this spirit of nonviolence, studying and practicing nonviolence in all its facets, we keep our flame lit, and remain vigilant against the darkness. Today’s gospel calls us to stay awake as we await the coming of the Messiah. We invite you to tend the flame of nonviolence in your heart and in the world throughout this Advent season. We begin with a prayer, that we might begin to disarm our hearts, kindling the spirit of nonviolence, becoming an ever-brighter light in the darkness.

And soon, another candle will be lit. And then another, and another, until Emmanuel, God among us, is born.

Questions for Reflection

What issue of violence, whether direct, cultural, or structural, challenges you?

Where do you see signs of hope that violence can be overcome?

Lighting of the candle

ONE PURPLE CANDLE

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we look forward with hope to the coming of Christ.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Prayer

Disarm me, God

Come, put away the sword I still carry somewhere in my heart. Take away the violence that lingers in my soul. Make me an instrument of Your peace. You have a plan for me: fulfill it! In this world of armaments, disarm me and I shall be able to disarm others.

Come, God. There is still a trace of war and madness in my veins. Purify me, O God, and I shall let loose disarmament in the world that will cause people to praise you freely. Purify me of all violence and I shall stand before the powers and principalities without fear and free of those trapped in the structures of fear and violence.

Come, God. Disarm me without my knowing it, and then, show me that you are the Disarming One, nonviolent from the beginning of time until the end of time. Disarming Presence, Unconditional Love, Great Reconciler, Suffering Servant, Patience Personified, Peaceful Mother, come, bearing peace.

Come, God. Disarm this restless heart which wanders off into apathy and selfishness, but which longs to rest in You. Lead this heart into the fire of your Love, where it can be consumed by the Flame of Nonviolence, setting fire to other hearts nearby. Let your unilateral disarmament engage me, win me over, force the scales to fall from my eyes and the

weapons to be released from my hands. Push me into the violent hearts of others that I may take on their anger and release them from the chains of hatred and the bonds of violence.

Disarm me, God, and I shall disarm others. Disarm me, God, that I may be one with all humanity, all your sons and daughters. Disarm me, God, and bring me into Your reign, to live forever in peace and love.

- Prayers of Protest, by John Dear, S.J.

Response

Pray for someone with whom you have a conflict.

Name a hope you have for yourself, your family, your community this Advent. What can you do to make it a reality?

"Our faith and prayer need to become the springboard for us to grow in intimacy with God and sensitivity towards others, especially the poor and those in need. Praying should help us to become better human beings seeking what is just and good in our daily life. Our faith, our way of praying and our spiritual life need to become the spiritual wheelhouse from which we draw the motivation for our efforts to make a better world, to care for the environment, to help people in need, the sick, the lonely and to build a Christian community centered around Christ and based on peace, justice and love."

- Father Roberto Rodriguez
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
Seen here in Japan



Second Week of Advent

“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

MATTHEW 3: 3

Prepare your heart to turn towards peace

“Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” As we prepare the way for the Lord, John the Baptist challenges us to face the most difficult realities in our lives and in our world.

Ours is a culture that too often encourages magical thinking: Protect corporations and billionaires, and wealth will trickle down to poor and working families. Fight wars to achieve peace. End crime and undocumented migration by hiding people away in prisons. End racism by not talking about racism. Simply think about what you want, and it will manifest itself. Again and again, we are told to hide, destroy, or ignore what is hard or painful, and trust that good things will be ours.

Out of the desert and into this cacophony of snake oil sales pitches appears John with a different kind of prescription: go to the hard place. Do the work of healing and reconciliation.

John’s call is echoed in the gospel call to nonviolence. When we commit to nonviolence, we recognize different forms of violence and our participation. We must repent of violence – whether direct, physical violence or systemic and structural violence, the violence of attack and exploitation or that of exclusion and indifference.

The very word nonviolence speaks to this discernment: it is not simply non-violence, or the absence of violence. Nonviolence requires that we recognize violence and its root causes in order to resist and transform it.

Let us consider our interior attitudes and interpersonal relationships, but also engage in social analysis: how do I participate in structures that perpetuate violence? Economic exploitation, racism and other forms of discrimination, the destruction of the environment and contribution to climate change are all forms of violence. When we vote for leaders who spend trillions of dollars on weapons while failing to fund human needs, and we pay taxes into that system, we are complicit in violence.

In committing to nonviolence, the Maryknoll Lay Missioners have identified three ways nonviolence is expressed vis-à-vis violence: prevention, intervention, and restoration/reconciliation. The second step is like the sacrament of reconciliation: intervention requires naming and repenting sinful behavior. Restoration and reconciliation mean rebuilding right relationships. And prevention means developing new behaviors that seek the common good.

Nonviolence is the path to peace with justice: it produces “fruit in keeping with repentance.” As we prepare the way for the Lord, let us identify and repent of the violence in our lives.

Questions for Reflection

What is a crooked path in your life that blocks peace?

Who is a voice in the wilderness calling you to turn toward peace?

Lighting of the candles

TWO PURPLE CANDLES

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 3: 1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Prayer

O Lord, who has mercy on all, take away from me my sins and mercifully kindle in me the fire of your Holy Spirit.

Take away from me the heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh, a heart to love and adore you, a heart to delight in you, to follow and to enjoy you, for Christ's sake.

- Saint Ambrose



Father Frank Breen
Maryknoll Fathers and
Brothers
Seen here with children
in Kenya

"When the divine enters into human affairs, it defies human logic, confounds human expectations, and usually goes unrecorded in important news outlets. This is what is known by scripture scholars as the "divine reversal." God is definitely human and acting in our world. And humans are reversing the age-old ways of selfishness, greed and violence, and instead acting in divine fashion. This is what the divine reversal means."

Response

Look around your community for individuals who are building peace through nonviolent practices and dialogue. What is one of their habits or activities you can emulate?

Pick one of the peacemakers named by Pope Francis in his World Day of Peace Message in 2017 and search online to learn more about their stories. https://bit.ly/WDP_2017

Read reflections on active nonviolence written by Maryknoll Missioners.

<http://maryknollogc.org/tag/maryknoll-nonviolence-reflections>

Third week of Advent

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.”

MATTHEW 11: 4-5

Rejoice, for the Lord is near

In lighting our Advent candles, we have taken stock of the darkness and persistent violence in our world. We have contemplated our own participation in that violence, and repented. Now, in this Gaudete Sunday, we light a pink candle, and rejoice, for the incarnation is near.

When the imprisoned John the Baptist sends followers to inquire whether Jesus is “the one who is to come,” Jesus replies by pointing to the signs he has performed. “Go and tell John what you hear and see.” The blind see, the lame walk, good news is proclaimed to the poor. As we reflect this Advent on gospel nonviolence, what are the signs of the nonviolent Jesus at work in the world today?

We do well to look first to the examples of women. Years before the events of today’s reading, Mary, pregnant with Jesus, meets Elizabeth, pregnant with John, and expresses in the Magnificat the significance of the incarnation for bringing about just peace: by becoming her humble child, God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

Today as well, women often model nonviolence as the path to just peace. Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative has documented striking examples of effective, active nonviolence by women leaders:

In the Philippines, peace activist Myla Leguro developed a method of dialogue to prepare individuals and communities for negotiations to settle land disputes. Her process builds skills, trust, and agreements that serve as a

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basis for addressing wider conflicts. It has been adopted in conflict zones around the world, including central Africa, where other leaders have further developed her model.

In northern Kenya, Pax Christi peacebuilder Elizabeth Kanini Kimau facilitated dialogue between warring pastoralist communities. Understanding the respect afforded elders, she invited elders from all sides to dialogue in a safe, neutral location. The elders recruited warriors to follow suit, who in turn invited youth. The elders have since established ongoing dialogue to resolve conflicts before they erupt into violence.

In Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, Operazione Colomba’s Sara Ionovitz opened spaces for dialogue from the grassroots to top-level state actors through “popular democratic diplomacy,” allowing refugees to contribute plans for peace to negotiations for the first time. The presence of her team also built bridges of dialogue between Syrians and the Lebanese host population.

Let us pause this week to notice the prophets of nonviolence in our world, to recognize the leadership of women, and see the signs of God with us, where nonviolence has led to peace with justice.

Questions for Reflection

What gives you joy during this Advent Season?

What peacebuilding trait do you see in a women leader you can name?

Lighting of the Candle

TWO PURPLE AND ONE PINK CANDLE

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we rejoice in the coming of our savior.

Gospel Reading: MATTHEW 11:2-11

When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.' Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects, and
shared dreams.

Amen.

- Prayer by Pope Francis



Sister Connie
Krautkremer
Maryknoll Sisters

"Friendships fall apart. We can no longer speak honestly with a relative or trusted colleague. We are hurt and we hurt others. Do we recognize our wounds, admit our feelings of bitterness, some new, some years old? Do we need to hold on? Hidden wounds do not heal. Can we offer these to God, allow ourselves to be touched, to experience mercy, to offer mercy? The apostles unlocked the doors and walked boldly into the streets, to heal the sick and restore relationships in the community. When we can say we are sorry a load is lifted. Our hearts are opened, and we are free. God is merciful, full of mercy, for all, for ALL!"

Response

Take time this week to live joyfully. Smile and laugh more; be intentional about your thoughts and refocus when necessary; count your blessings and be thankful.

Name ways you can bring joy to someone who needs encouragement to persevere, and do them!

Name a social problem that moves you to want to make a difference. Is there a person or group that you can ask to help you get involved?



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

Joseph was distraught at the news that Mary would have a baby. He thought of divorcing her quietly, not accusing her of infidelity, but leaving her and the child. But the angel of God greets him with the words of divine consolation frequently uttered throughout Scripture: “Be not afraid.” The angel advises Joseph to neither accuse Mary nor quietly leave her, but to remain by her side, and receive her child, who is God with us.

We often feel overwhelmed by the circumstances in our lives and in our world. We may be tempted to seek an easy way out, or even to respond in ways that betray our faith in a compassionate God. Throughout the last year, the world has watched in horror as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to a brutal and drawn-out war. Like Joseph, we are driven by compassion and concern, but we may despair of finding an appropriate response.

Throughout the war, however, Pope Francis has worked unrelentingly to bring God’s message of peace through nonviolence to the people of Ukraine, Russia, and the world. It is difficult to tell the victims of war, as the bombs drop, “Be not afraid.” But Francis has surely heard the angel’s message, and he has addressed the war almost daily, denouncing the invasion, insisting repeatedly that conflict can never be solved with violence, that war is never just, while remaining sensitive to the excruciating decisions Ukrainians face, and the moral complexities of defending one’s home and community in a world that has failed to

invest adequately in developing and employing nonviolent tools for preventing and confronting violence.

We must always be open to dialogue, Francis says, even with the aggressor. “It smells bad, but it has to be done.”

Repeating a message from 2017, he says, “One hundred years ago, Benedict XV... described the war as a ‘useless massacre.’ Disassociating oneself from the so-called ‘reasons for the war’ seemed to many to be almost an affront. But history teaches that war is always and only a useless massacre. Let us help each other... to embark on paths of nonviolence and paths of justice, which favor peace. Because in the face of peace we cannot be indifferent or neutral... That is why we invoke the *ius pacis* as the right of all to resolve conflicts without violence. That is why we repeat: never again war, never again against others, never again without others!”

Questions for Reflection

Are there relationships in your life that are in need of reconciliation, peace and mercy?

Is there a situation in your life in which you need to hear ‘be not afraid’?

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

Response

Name an opportunity you have in your church or community to be peacemaker.

Sign up for our email list to receive our newsletter and action alerts about issues of peace and justice.

www.maryknollogc.org

Read our study guide of Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti to learn more about his teachings on peace and nonviolence.

<https://bit.ly/FTStudyGuide>



“Love is at the heart of our calling: “Love one another,” Jesus says, “as I have loved you.” Love includes justice, even demands justice – but it goes beyond justice. We cannot be considered serious if we claim to love anyone, and especially impoverished people of this world, yet not be concerned with the injustices of society that diminish the dignity of every human being and human life itself.”

– Abby Belt

Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Pictured here sewing facemasks in Haiti