

Nonviolence: A Language of Love

International Day of Nonviolence

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: On October 2nd, the global community will, once again, engage in prayer, dialogue, and action to commemorate the International Day of Nonviolence. With the growing tide of violence in our world today, leaders of the peace movement call us to embrace actively peaceful behaviors in the midst of conflict. Marie Dennis, co-director of Pax Christi International, writes, “Nonviolence is often misrepresented, misunderstood, or too narrowly defined. Rarely is there sufficient human or financial investment in developing the spirituality of nonviolence or effective nonviolent practices.” She continues, “Integrating Gospel nonviolence into the life and work of the Church would encourage Catholics to support the development of more effective nonviolent practices for protecting vulnerable communities, avoiding violent conflict, transforming structures of violence, and promoting cultures of peace.”

At the heart of Gospel nonviolence is the vision of the beloved community, the reign of God, the truth that all life is sacred. As we come together in prayer, we turn to Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, and to the women and men of yesterday and today who teach us that nonviolence is much more than a strategy, but a way of life. May we draw inspiration and strength to journey together on our communal quest to transform our world into a global community of nonviolence.

Reader 1: Through his nonviolent activism, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., played a central role in ending the legal segregation of African American citizens in the South and the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He saw with his own eyes how people were treated unfairly because of their skin color. He heard the cries of mothers whose children were killed for peacefully protesting. “It is not the violence of the few that scares me. It is the silence of the many,” he lamented.



PRAYER SERVICE

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, may we see the injustice that surrounds us through the eyes of Dr. King. May we open our ears to the cries of our suffering sisters and brothers who are the human casualties of violence perpetrated by corruption, militarism, and war. And, finally, may we become voices that challenge – voices that refuse to stand by and allow others to be stripped of their human dignity and exercising their basic human rights.

Reader 2: Rigoberta Menchú used her voice to promote and defend the dignity of the Mayan people and campaigned for a just, democratic, and peaceful solution to Guatemala’s civil war – a war that was destroying the Mayan culture and poisoning the earth. “I think that nonviolence is one way of saying that there are other ways to solve problems, not only through weapons and war,” said Rigoberta.

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, Rigoberta Menchú recognized that the “person on one side of the trench and the person on the other side of the trench are both human beings, with the same faculties. At some point they have to begin to understand one another.” May we grow in our understanding that no matter the path we walk, we are called to be our brother and sister’s keepers and to remove the divisions and inequalities that blind us from recognizing every person’s God-given dignity.

Reader 3: Mahatma Gandhi helped lead India to independence and influenced social change across the world through nonviolent disobedience. His commitment to nonviolence and using fasts for means of protest proclaimed his message that, “Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being.”

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, through his pacifist teachings Mahatma Gandhi taught us to remain steadfast to the practice of nonviolence, even under the most oppressive conditions and in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. May we remain persistent in our quest for justice and learn from all those who are using nonviolence to build a community that honors the dignity and worth of every human being.

Reader 4: Mairead Corrigan Maguire witnessed the tragic death of her niece and two nephews that resulted from the deep ethnic and political conflict in Northern Ireland. She responded to the violence by organizing peaceful demonstrations, imploring for an end to the bloodshed, and a promoting a nonviolent solution to the conflict.

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, may we join with Mairead Corrigan Maguire and sow seeds of nonviolence here and now and learn to seek diplomatic solutions to conflicts that exist in our families, communities, nations, and world.

Reader 5: Monseñor Óscar Romero, the saint of the poor and the oppressed, spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture. “I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, and repression.”



PRAYER SERVICE

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, may we learn from Monseñor Óscar Romero how to love both our neighbors and our enemies, and may we never tire of upholding Gospel nonviolence and embracing its practice in our local, national, and global communities.

Reader 6: Jane Addams worked tirelessly to rid the world of war and stood on the side of the poor. She was ridiculed for publicly opposing America's involvement in the First World War and for her humanitarian efforts in providing relief supplies of food to the women and children of the enemy nations. Jane was also a firm believer that the voices of women were fundamental in ending war and other forms of injustice.

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, may we learn from Jane Addams's example of steadfastness to stand in solidarity with women throughout the world who use their voices as instruments for peace and nonviolence.

Reader 7: Dolores Huerta and César Chávez introduced into the world the concept of boycotting as a nonviolent method for defending the rights of the oppressed and raising awareness of unjust structures. Through grassroots organizing, they showed us that nonviolence can bring about social change.



All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, like Dolores Huerta and César Chávez may we find the courage to engage in nonviolent action when we witness the disproportionate suffering experienced by vulnerable groups within our communities.

Reader 8: John Dear, outspoken peace activist, continues to remind us, "Nonviolence is active love that seeks justice and peace for the whole human race, beginning with the poor and oppressed. This all-encompassing love that embraces every human being on the planet, refuses to kill anyone and works for social justice for everyone."

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, may we have the courage to allow John Dear's words to dismantle every weapon of violence that has found a resting place, either in our homes or our communities – from domestic violence to poverty, from racial profiling to the mistreatment of animals, and from the nuclear bomb to the handgun.

Reader 9: Shirin Ebadi, an internationally recognized lawyer and advocate for human rights, has devoted much of her life to defending the rights of women, children, and political prisoners in Iran. Through her activism, she reminds us that we must demand "...a non-violent world where human security is the basis of our common global security. People have the right to live in a world where the basic needs of all peoples are addressed. No more military attacks. No more war."



PRAYER SERVICE

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, Shirin Ebadi has fallen victim to character assassination and has received countless death threats. May we learn from her example to see fear as a human instinct and train ourselves to live with fear and not allow it to silence or hold us back from nonviolent action.

Reader 10: John Lennon and Yoko Ono used their fame and music to promote world peace and nonviolence. Their honeymoon consisted of a week-long “Bed-In for Peace” where they recorded the anti-war song, “Give Peace a Chance.” For 12 hours a day, they opened their door to the global press to discuss peace and ending the Vietnam War. They taught us to stand up for what we believe in and to dream big.

All: Jesus, our Nonviolent Brother, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, through their nonconformist artistic expressions, drew the world’s attention to world peace and nonviolence. May we find ways to support artists living and working in conflict zones as they assert the power of creativity and counteract the demonization of the enemy; and may we find ways to educate young people to dream big about peace, connection, and empowerment through art and imagination.

Pause for a moment of silence. Leader invites participants to share their thoughts on nonviolence in today's world.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Peace, from the beginning of time you inspired heroic women and men to embrace non-violence as a way of life.

Inspire us to learn from their witness to be more nonviolent to all those around us, even to your creatures and to the earth.

Arouse within us a desire to become more involved in grassroots movements and to explore ways to integrate Gospel nonviolence into our own lives and the life and work of the Church.

Nudge us to support effective non-violent practices to protect vulnerable communities, avoid violent conflict, transform structures of violence, and promote cultures of peace.

Give us the grace to accompany the nonviolent Jesus on his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, to the cross and the resurrection that we may truly become women and men of nonviolence demonstrating that every person can move the world in the direction of peace through their daily nonviolent choice and action. Amen.

