



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Just Peace and Gospel Nonviolence

September 2023

Introduction

Just peace is the mutual commitment to and pursuit of social cohesion and equity. It works to prevent or stop violence and builds lasting and sustainable peace. Just peace principles include protecting human life; dignity; and the common good; right intention; inclusive political participation; restoration; right relationship; reconciliation; and sustainability. Nonviolence is the personal practice of not causing harm to others under any circumstances. Just Peace and Gospel Nonviolence, are all rooted in LOVE.

Call to Prayer

Triune God, *Source of love*, open and widen our hearts and shape us into a new creation of your love. *Word of love*, teach us how to love and be the healing presence needed in our world today. *Spirit of love*, free us to let go, risk and become prophetic witnesses of universal communion. May Blessed Theresa, a woman of love, accompany us on this transformative journey, ever seeking to know and do Love's will. (SSND prayer for 25th General Chapter)

Experience

All creation is formed and developed based on harmony and interconnectedness in the image of our Trinitarian Loving God. As we reflect and pray on Just Peace and Gospel Nonviolence, perhaps some of us are facing or are in the middle of violent situations. Harsh words, harmful actions, abusive treatment, destructive relationships, threatening weapons of war, indifference to suffering, and oppressive silence all have the potential to do violence to the human spirit and the natural environment. When harmony is interrupted by nature or by human force, violence often results. However, the human spirit, by nature, longs for and seeks peace and happiness.

Violence is destructive to oneself, as well as to others and it can appear in many forms. Preparing this reflection taught me that violence is not something "out there" to be avoided, but something to be recognized within oneself. As I approached this task, I kept telling myself that I had no resources for this topic and didn't know where to begin. I spent weeks trying to be focused and got nowhere. My self-criticism constructed a barrier and stilted creativity. I was doing violence to myself. This is a habit that has formed in me and needs to be addressed. When I could finally address my negative self-talk and let it go, I sensed the creativity of the Spirit moving me forward and the ideas began to come together and flow on paper.

One of my sisters had been secretary in her local parish for nearly 25 years. She loved her ministry and has a gentle personality and way of relating to others that is truly focused on the other. A new pastor was assigned to the parish to reduce the parish budget. One of the first things he did was dismiss my sister from the parish staff. Because of her many years of service, she had the highest salary. Of course, no personal harm was meant, but the sudden and abrupt announcement was not easy to receive. Although she felt the pain and loss of a position and daily contacts that she loved, she quickly renewed her commitment to the parish as a catechist. She also became a regular volunteer on the social services committee. Several parishioners asked her: "After years of dedicated service in the parish, how can you continue working closely with a pastor who dismissed you so abruptly?" Rather than a negative response, she turned her

energy and love of the parish into a new avenue of service. Her example and attitude have always been an inspiration to me and, no doubt, to many others who know her. Her nonviolent, gentle, loving ways with family, coworkers, and friends are a Christian witness to nonviolence. I pray to walk beside and in solidarity with her and many other men and women who continue the mission of Jesus with love and compassion in their daily lives.

Reflection

In a short video on April 31, the 60th anniversary of the publishing of Pope John XXIII encyclical “Pacem in Terris”, Pope Francis stated: “*Living, speaking and acting without violence is not surrendering, losing or giving up anything, but aspiring to everything.*” He calls us all to develop a culture of peace, making nonviolence a guide for our actions in daily life as well as in international relations. He invites us to pray and work for a more widespread culture of nonviolence. Individually and together, we can be instruments of peace, live and support peace and not war, harmony and not conflict, sincere dialogue and not harmful words.

Following Jesus Christ’s example, there are many modern-day prophets who have witnessed nonviolence. Likewise, as we remain open, we can be formed and transformed by Scripture as we read, reflect, pray and live by it. We can also be moved by Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5: 38-48*), the compassion and justice offered to the woman caught in adultery (*John 8:1-11*), his openness to be influenced by a pagan mother (*Matthew 15:21-28*), and his response to the criminal dying on the cross near him (*Luke 23: 39-43*). As Jesus offered his own life for love of us, He calls us to live out the conviction that *Love Gives Everything* without conditions or reserve. It sends us on a mission with the assurance that He is with us until the end of time.

Action

We might ask ourselves today:

1. At this time in my life, what nourishes my heart, what fills my thoughts and motivates my commitments?
2. Does Jesus and his nonviolent way of life make a difference in my life?
3. When and how do I share the joy of Gospel nonviolence with others?
4. From September 21 to October 2 is Catholic Nonviolence Action Days. Consider:
 - Making a commitment to prayer and action in solidarity with someone or a group of people suffering injustice in your area (refugees, the abused, abandoned elderly, and prisoners.)
 - Pray and work towards a better understanding of someone or a group who leaves you confused, irritated, or angry.
 - If possible, invite someone to an open, prayerful dialogue regarding your differences.

Closing Prayer

Lord, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, and our universe. Let us dream, pray, and work together to build a world of peace and justice for all. May my heart forgive without limit. May my love for friend, enemy, and outcast be without measure. May my needs be few and my living simple. May my actions bear witness to Gospel nonviolence. Amen!

(Cf. Song *Lead Us from Death to Life* by Satish Kumar and Marty Haugen)

*Prepared by Sister Leetta Hammack, Province of Latin America and the Caribbean
for the International Shalom Network. Graphic taken from the Directional Statement, 24th General Chapter.
Design: Congregational Communications Office.*