



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

VIOLENCE AND PEACE THE ORIGIN OF TWO OPPOSITE WAYS OF BUILDING SOCIETY

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Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Article 19, OSF Rule

In his Message for the 50th World Day of Peace, titled “Non-Violence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” Pope Francis urges families, faith communities, government leaders and the international community to practice non-violence and work to build a world of justice and peace.

I was delighted when I learned that the 2017 World Day of Peace message would be about Gospel nonviolence. It is a topic I have been most passionate about since getting involved in peace and justice work so many years ago. During my tenure as Animator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, I have consistently spoken about the many forms of violence and how we are not even aware of them most of the time; especially the way we communicate with one another.

The Holy Father’s message speaks of violence as producing serious negative social consequences, while peace promotes positive social consequences allowing the achievement of real progress. I am sure we have been in situations where the communication exchange was not at all peaceful; full of accusations and scathing criticisms. Did you feel progress being made? Most likely not. You probably felt like you were at a stalemate, at best. This kind of exchange is neither productive nor helpful. We tend toward this kind of communication without realizing the violent and negative effects on the persons involved.

Pope Francis’ message of peace is a call to all the faithful to live the nonviolent way of Jesus. Yes, we will have disagreements with our brothers and sisters, but we must live our call as Gospel people and learn to disagree agreeably. There will always be differing opinions. But remember, conflict is inevitable, violence is not. Instead of jumping to conclusions, take the time to understand the other before you are understood. Truly listen to your brother or sister and understand the meaning behind the message or the words spoken.

There is a tendency toward making assumptions based on opinion. What I mean is, we have an opinion

of the person or organization, and based on that opinion, we color everything they say or do in the light of that opinion, even if what they say or do is positive or just. They “rubbed you the wrong way,” so everything about them is viewed from that perspective. Many of us have done this. No judgment here, just fact. After all, we are human, right? Well, this is where your nightly examination of conscience comes in handy.

- What past judgments are you holding about a certain person or organization?
- Is every action of the person or organization held under the scrutiny of that past judgment?
- Are you willing to let those past judgments go and start each encounter afresh? Why or why not?

Truly reflect on these questions in light of the Gospels. This is the basis of living Gospel nonviolence. This is the basis of building viable and peaceable communities. This is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called the beloved community. As Seculars, we are the beginning of the beloved community; or at least we should be a substantial part of it. So, what can we do to begin to build this beloved community? And, what can we do to sustain it? First, watch our conversations and how we communicate with one another. Be mindful of how we are BEING towards our brothers and sisters. Second, set the right intention when in community with our Franciscan family. Do you intend to have a peaceful encounter? Do you intend to build bridges or build walls? Do you intend to treat your brother or sister as “other” and not as “object”?

This conversation will be ongoing throughout the year, leading up to the National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Gathering this July 27-30, 2017 in St. Louis, Missouri. We will talk about nonviolent living through mindful and empathic listening, as well as other ways to live Gospel nonviolence. Watch your emails for early bird registrations. May you live as Jesus and Saint Francis lived – with Gospel nonviolence and as people of peace and justice.