

All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY  
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To this topic, "Giving Birth to Jesus in the World," I would add "The Jesus Who Loves Without Violence."

Thanks to our dear friend Fr. Fred and you good people of All Saints Parish for the hospitality you have shown Marilyn and me each time we have been able to celebrate Mass with you in the past, and again this weekend. Marilyn and I were fortunate to be with Fr. Fred at St. Francis DeSales in Utica for several years, before we moved to Western New York. It was our privilege. Welcome also to members of our Romero Community from Utica.

Today's Gospel reading quotes Isaiah "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight". Still today we have the responsibility to "Prepare the way" and "straighten the paths"...for our Lord. 2000 years later, we can all observe that the path is not straight; the hills are still not level.

About 20 years ago, it occurred to me during my meditation that I not only COULD, but was CALLED UPON, to give birth to Jesus into this world. What I will share in the next few minutes is what I have learned in the past few decades, and that is making the path straight is doing what Jesus calls us to do - love without violence. I believe that loving without violence, for those of us who believe in Jesus is making the path straight and leveling the hills. Is it even imaginable to you that we could "Prepare the way for Jesus" with violence, mayhem, destruction and death?

Loving without violence is very explicit in Jesus commands. You already know this: "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and to Love your neighbor as yourself."

It is very easy for me to "Make Straight the Path" by loving my Wife Marilyn and my 6 sons and their families. It is quite easy for me to love Bruce and Darlene and their 3 young children next door; and Clayton and Patricia who make me feel good as I work around my yard, or Bob across the street who agrees with me that our tax assessments are too high.

But, in the 5th Chapter of St. Matthew, Jesus He clears up any doubt about what this means for us. He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father...For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

So, Jesus is quite clear that the love he refers to in this Commandment to Love our Neighbor - will be the difficult love for our enemy.

I have come to believe that this Commandment means that we Jesus is calling us to live a life of love without violence; and that this applies to our personal, community and international relationships.

I want to be sensitive here. It took me years to come to my own understanding. Here is a way to think about this Command to Love our Enemies without Violence.

We can think about it with a Five Step Process using Jesus' Teachings. Here are the Five Steps:

God is Love.

Jesus is the Incarnation of the God of Love.

Jesus, the Incarnation of the God of Love, Taught us to Love without Violence.

Jesus' Life Example of Nonviolence Sets Forth a Model for Us.

Jesus Calls Us to Unity With Him and His Father, i.e., He Calls Us to Love Without Violence.

God is a God of love: John's first letter reminds us that "love comes from God." And he adds, "God is love, and whoever lives in love -lives in God and God lives in him." And John repeats that "God is Love".

Jesus is the Incarnation of the God of Love. We have from the 17th Chap. of John's Gospel, Jesus praying to the Father, "Let them be one, just as you and I are One". We as Christians believe that Jesus is God – Divine, and we believe that HE "is the LORD and there is no other, - there is no God besides" Him.

Scripture shows that His love is nonviolent. This is explicit, unambiguous and straightforward. For example:

- a. From Matthew 5th Chapter, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Love Your Enemies".
- b. Also from the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers – they are the children of God"
- c. "Bless those who curse you"
- d. "Do good to those who hate you"
- e. "Forgive 77x7 times".
- f. Turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, and "from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic"
- g. "Put Away your Sword, because all who take the sword will die by the sword" --- This was Jesus' last commandment to his disciples.
- h. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans: "If your enemy is hungry give him something to eat, if he is thirsty give him something to drink"
- i. And finally within the short space of about 2 Chapters in John's Gospel,
  - \* John 13: 34 "I give you a new commandment, love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
  - § John 15:12 "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."
  - § Repeated again in John15: 17 "This I command you: love one another."

Jesus' Life Example was Love Without Violence.

What gives Jesus Teachings credibility is that He lived what he taught, as we say, "He Walked the Walk". Otherwise he would have contradicted Himself.

§ He lived in an occupied country

§ He did not instruct anyone to organize a militia or to try to overthrow the ruling Romans – in fact he says, "Repay to Caesar that which is Caesar's"

§ It is not recorded that he injured anyone

§ He took suffering upon Himself in total nonviolence rather than inflicting it upon his opponents.

§ He said, "Father forgive them".

§ If ever there were a justification for "Self Defense", Jesus' arrest, torture and crucifixion would have been it. But, He did not use/teach a self-defense rationale.

In short, He taught us to Love our Enemy More Than We Desire Revenge.

Finally, Jesus calls us to be One with Him and His Father, In John Chap. 17, His Prayer for Unity, He prays, "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us." Then the conclusion is that because He lived and taught a Life of Love without violence - then He calls us to a life of love without violence.

- o Again, Jesus' instructions to His followers regarding nonviolent love are clear, and made explicit in His call to "love our enemies".
- o It follows that to be a disciple of Jesus, we must proclaim and live out love without violence as he did.
- o Jesus calls us to be peacemakers in the midst of a violent world.

**Pope Benedict XVI has said, "Once again I would repeat that military options are no solution and that violence, wherever it comes from and whatever form it takes, must be firmly condemned." In his homily on Nov. 25, the Feast of Christ the King, he said, "'God's Kingdom is of a completely different kind; it is not built on arms and violence...'"**

Our love of our enemies should call us to peace. Today, in this Mass, we will pray for Peace: I recently found that the Mass has many prayerful references to Peace, at least 10, not including our scriptural readings...E.G.:

- a. "The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you."
- b. "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give to you. Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever."
- c. "The Mass is ended, go in peace." Or "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord"
- d. In addition to those examples from the ten references, when we pray: "thy kingdom come"...what is our vision of that kingdom – one of violence, war, death, destruction and mayhem? No, the kingdom is one of peace.

But, are we conscious that we are praying for peace? or what type of peace are we praying for? Is it peace defined in our own terms? A.A. Milne wrote in the 1930s, "A family decides to buy a

new refrigerator. The husband says that it must cost less than \$100. The wife says it must be large and white. The maid says that it must be easy to clean. The cook says that it must be near the stove. The butler says that it must be near the dining room. - If after 5 years they still do not have a refrigerator – it does not mean that refrigerators do not exist. Perhaps we are all praying for our own type of refrigerator, or peace on our own terms.

I was born in 1941. In my lifetime we have been to war on foreign soil more than 11 times....and we are now expanding into Pakistan and Somalia and elsewhere - and we have financed others, for example, Nicaragua and El Salvador). (Archbishop Romero wrote in his letter to President Carter, "Please stop sending weapons and ammunition, they are killing our people.") One view of history says that the longest period this nation has been without war was 23 years.

But, Jesus leads us to live our lives in love of neighbor and enemy - without violence.

This was not easy for me in my earlier years. I studied Military Science for two years at Niagara University, and was employed by the US Navy for seven years. This was before I began to understand Jesus' Commands. I have had two sons in the military and a relative in the Iraq/Afghanistan War Zones.

I know that the teachings that Jesus gives us call for very, very strong faith, and can lead to fear and raise many questions that begin with, "But, what about this situation or that situation..." But, Paul tells us in Philippians that it is his prayer "that your love for one another may grow more and more with the knowledge and complete understanding....so that we will be innocent and free of any trace of guilt when the day of Christ comes". And Our 1st Reading tell us that it is "Yahweh who has done great deeds for them, and for us." Loving without Violence calls for very strong faith in God....not faith in bombs, drones and other weapons, and above all, Love for our Enemies. As others have said, "If we make them our friends, we will have no enemies."

Today's Opinion Section of your local newspaper carries an opinion piece by a noted columnist, "Making the Case for Targeted Assassination". Is this replacing the teaching of Jesus?

Perhaps this afternoon you may have a few moments to spare. Here is a suggestion: Consider a person that you dislike, and find one thing that you can do for that person out of love. It takes practice. So, after doing that one thing, think of a second - and do that also. For Jesus also tells us – "It is not they who say, 'Lord, Lord', but they who do the will of my father, who will enter the kingdom of heaven." We know his will. It is in His teachings and Life Example.

God bless, and peace to each of you. Go Make Straight the Path and Level the Hills. Love One Another.

Thank you.