Enter the Desert Experience:

40 Days of

Prayer, Fasting and Action for Peace

Prepared by
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Prayer and meditation have an important part to play in opening up new ways and new horizons. If your prayer is the expression of a deep and grace-inspired desire for newness of life—and not the mere blind attachment to what has always been familiar and "safe"—God will act in us and through us to renew the Church by preparing, in prayer, what we cannot yet imagine or understand. In this way our prayer and faith today will be oriented toward the future which we ourselves may never see fully realized on earth.

-Thomas Merton
from *Contemplation in a World of Action*

Today, more than ever, we need to open ourselves to God with a desire to let God create our hearts anew. The desert has always been that place of facing ourselves and facing our God. In this time of great fear and violence, of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, of escalating violence in the Middle East, of Genocide in Darfur, of fear of terrorism in the US, and car bombings in Europe, let us enter the desert to deeply experience the love of God. We hope that you can spend just 7 minutes a day reflecting on the Gospel peace, love and nonviolence . Let us go forth with Jesus for the next 40 days, freely and with a real openness to the Spirit.

Why 7 minutes? In 1947, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a magazine founded by nuclear scientists in Chicago who had worked on the first atomic bomb, created a Doomsday Clock to signal how close the world had come to a nuclear catastrophe. That year the clock stood at 7 minutes to midnight. A lot has changed since then, and a lot has stayed the same. We still live in fear of that catastrophe, just different sources.

Just 7 minutes can make a difference. It can change us as individuals, as faith communities, and as a nation.

7 MINUTES, that's all.

Day 1: Saturday, August 25th
Today we celebrate St. Louis of France.

St. Louis IX, (1215-1270) who became King of France at the age of twelve, had been religiously brought up by his mother, Blanche of Castile. Throughout his life he remained deeply devout and as a king his conduct was that of a real saint. He devoted himself to the affairs of his kingdom and to those of Christendom and was a great peacemaker — kings and princes constantly sought his aid in settling disputes.

Churches have kept visioning and dreaming alive. In the Scriptures, Jesus presents us with a Kingdom based on love, even love of enemies. Is that your dream?

Reflection: Spend time today reflecting whether Jesus' dream, the Reign of God, is a real possibility to you. What evidence of that can be found in your life?

Action: Take time to listen to the other side of a conflict or difficult situation today instead of just reacting. Say a kind word to someone you find difficult.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart and mind to your vision for our world. Help me to find that place of peace that allows me to become a peacemaker. Amen.

Day 2: Sunday, August 26th

Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.

Luke 13:23-24

No one has ever said that the way of Jesus is easy. While the gate is narrow, and we do fail, we know that the mercy of God is generous. It is just a matter of trying again and again. We also need to acknowledge the consequences of our actions and make restitution.

"The [US Catholic Conference of Bishops] is under no illusions regarding Iraq. None of the alternative courses of action are without consequences for human life and dignity. There is no path ahead that leads to an unambiguously good outcome for Iraq, our nation and the world…Nevertheless, out nation must have the moral courage to change course in Iraq and to break the policy and political stalemate in Washington so that we can walk a difficult path that does the most good and the least damage in human and moral terms." - Bishop Thomas G. Wenski, Chair, Committee on International Policy of USCCB

Reflection: How have you, in your life, found the courage to enter by the narrow gate?

Action: Go to www.usccb.org and read more about the Bishops responses to the war in Iraq. Then, let your representatives know that we need a responsible transition in Iraq.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the courage to follow you through the narrow gate. Amen.

Day 3: Monday, August 27th
Feast of St. Monica

St. Monica (333-387) was born in Tagaste, northern Africa and died in Ostia, near Rome. Monica was a Christian, but her husband Patricius was a pagan and a man of loose morals. Monica's virtues and prayers, however, converted him, and he was baptized a year before his death. When her son, Augustine, joined the Manichean sect and went astray in faith and morals, Monica's tears and prayers for her son were incessant. She followed him to Milan, where Augustine went to teach, and there continued to storm heaven with her prayers for her son. Finally, she had the joy of witnessing St. Ambrose baptize Augustine in 387.

Persistence, storming heaven with prayer: virtues needed today. We are part of the instant culture. Patience is not our strong point. How different our world would be if we listened, took time to reflect, and then decided on action. How different we would be if we prayed more and let God be part of lives.

Reflection: Do you see patience and taking time to reflect on events before reacting a virtue? Remember a time when you know prayer made a difference. Has that increased your praying about the really difficult times in life?

Action: Renew your belief in prayer. Say a prayer with a believing heart for what you see as a "hopeless cause." Add that cause to your prayer list.

Prayer: O Lord, help my unbelief. Teach me patience and persistence. Amen

Day 4: Tuesday, August 28th
Feast of St. Augustine

St. Augustine (354-430) was born at Tagaste, Africa, and died in Hippo. His father, Patricius, was a pagan; his mother, Monica, a devout Christian. He received a good Christian education. As a law student in Carthage, however, he gave himself to all kinds of excesses and finally joined the Manichean sect. He then taught rhetoric at Milan where he was converted by St. Ambrose. Returning to Tagaste, he distributed his goods to the poor, and was ordained a priest. He was made bishop of Hippo at the age of 41 and became a great luminary of the African Church, one of the four great founders of religious orders, and a Doctor of the universal Church.

We all know about St. Augustine's Just War Theory. Are we aware of all the components? Do we also know that we have a tradition of nonviolence?

Reflection: How do I view violence? Do I justify it in certain situations? Why?

Action: Review the components of just war theory. Read about our tradition of nonviolence. You can find information at www.usccb.org/sdwp/harvestexr.shtml for both. Try one nonviolent practice today, even ridding yourself of violent language.

Prayer: O Lord, help me to discover your nonviolent response to injustice and insult. You were willing to endure the cross to show us the way of love. Teach me your way of love. Amen.

Day 5: Wednesday, August 29th
Martyrdom of John the Baptist

The Church, having celebrated the earthly birthday of St. John the Baptist on June 24, today honors the anniversary of his martyrdom. Today's Gospel relates the circumstances of his execution. He had the courage to blame Herod to his face for the scandal of his illegal union with his sister-in-law Herodias, whose husband was still alive. Herodias contrived to make Herod imprison him and took advantage of an unexpected opportunity to obtain, through her daughter, Salome, the beheading of the saint.

The courage to speak up does get us into trouble. But, we cannot remain silent in the face of injustice.

Reflection

How afraid am I to really speak up? Do I only express my concerns only when they will be well received? Am I willing to speak truth no matter what the consequences?

Action

Dare to speak the truth this week. If you don't know what is true in terms of Catholic Social Teaching, visit www.usccb.org or www.chatholiccharitiesusa.orbg.

Prayer: Lord, that I may have the courage to speak your truth. Amen.

Day 6: Thursday, August 30th

Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Matt: 24:45-45

"Our Conference has expressed particular concerns for Christians and other minority groups who have suffered in the aftermath of military action in Iraq along with the rest of the Iraqi population. In a special way, our nation must make provisions for refugees who have fled their native land in search of safety and security for their families."

Letter to The Honorable Tim Ryan From Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, Chairman, Committee on International Policy, July 17, 2007

Reflection: Are we considering what we must do to help the refugees and innocent victims on all sides of war? How are we meeting the needs of victims of other forms of violence? What can you do personally?

Action: Visit the Catholic Relief Services web site, www.crs.org, and find out how you can help. Visit other recognized agencies with proven track records and donate.

Call our local office of Catholic Charities that deals with refugees and see what they need: Office of Migration and Refugee Services, 216-281-7005. They have a list.

Prayer: Lord, help me open my arms and my resources to all those in need. Open my eyes to see all the victims so that I might reach out a helping hand. Amen.

Day 7: Friday, August 31st

Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.
Matt.25:13

"We urge Catholics, especially lay men and women who are called to be "leaven" in society, to continue to think deeply about the choices we face, to review carefully the teaching of our Church and to speak out strongly in accord with their conscience." **"Bishop Wilton D. Gregory's Statement on Iraq" February 26, 2003**

Reflection
We are adults. We cannot just sit in our own little world and let others make decisions for us. The price of decisions is paid by all, especially the poor. How carefully do you consider governmental decisions being made? Do you feel you have a voice? Do you exercise that voice? Do you carefully and knowingly vote for the best representation in government?

Action
Seek out the important issues. Learn more about them. Reflect on decisions in light of the gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. Then make your voice heard in a very real way. There is a lot happening right now in Congress. Say something in a real way. And do fast today.

Prayer
Lord, let me hear your words. Help me to more deeply understand your call of gospel values. May I learn to live by your gospel. Amen,

Day 8: Saturday, September 1st

For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Matt 25:29

The parable of the talents leaves us pondering. What have we been given, and how do we invest it become the important questions.

"The beauty of nature reminds us that we were told by God to cultivate and care for this garden that is the earth. If humanity lived in peace with God and each other, the earth would really look like a paradise." July 22, 2007-Appeal for Peace.

Reflection
What talents have I been given? How am I using them? If Jesus were to ask the results, would he be the pleased master?

Action
Spend some time listing the "wealth/talents" God has entrusted to you. Answer the question: are you suing them to produce fruit? If yes, could you do more? If no, how can you change that?

Prayer
Lord, enlighten my mind that I may truly see the talents you have entrusted to me. Tough my heart, that it might become more generous in using those gifts for the sake of the Kingdom. Amen.

Day 9: Sunday, September 2nd

When you give a dinner or banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsman or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite beggars and the crippled, the lame and the blind. You should be pleased that they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid in the resurrection of the just. Luke 14: 12-14

Generosity is being asked. Whatever we do, it is not about what we will get out of our actions, but how others are included at the banquet table. We don't ask about worthiness, but invite all, especially the least in society.

Reflection

Do I practice "pay it forward" by giving and not expecting in return? What does my circle of friends say about me? When I look around my community, who is welcomed? The more we see one another as family, the more we will attain peace among us.

Action

Write a letter to the editor or to your Congressmen speaking up on behalf of someone who is voiceless. It could be the voice of victims of war, of human trafficking, of genocide in Darfur, of undocumented workers, or the Palestinians and Israelis.

Prayer

Lord, teach me your generosity of heart. Help me to reach out without judging and without hope for reward. Open my eyes to see everyone as your beloved child. Amen.

Day 10: Monday, September 3rd
Labor Day; Feast of St. Gregory

St. Gregory, senator and prefect of Rome, then in succession monk, cardinal and pope, governed the Church from 590 to 604. At a period when the invasion of the barbarians created a new situation in Europe, he played a considerable part in the transitional stage, during which a great number of them were won for Christ. At the same time he watched over the holiness of the clergy and preserved ecclesiastical discipline, as well as attending to the temporal interests of his people of Rome and the spiritual interests of the whole of Christendom. His commentaries on Holy Scripture exercised a considerable influence on Christian thought, particularly in the Middle Ages.

Reflection

We can't all be Doctors of the Church, but we can take advantage of their wisdom. We can reflect on the importance of example. Do you truly believe violence can stop more violence?

Action

Visit www.catholicsforanend.org or www.networklobby.org to see what action you can take – and take it.

Prayer

Lord, help me to cultivate the nonviolent response in my life. Teach me how to promote nonviolence in all conflicts. Amen.

Day 11: Tuesday, September 4th

What is there about his word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out. And news of him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.

Luke 4: 36b-37

"Eight centuries ago, the city of Assisi would have found it difficult to imagine the role that providence was assigning to it, a role that has made this city well known throughout the world, that has make it an authentic "place of the soul." An event that happened here imprinted on this city an indelible character. I am referring to the conversion of young Francis."

Pope Benedict XVI in Assisi, June 19, 2007

Reflection

What has to happen to impress us? How many powerful models of living the gospel do we need? Do we believe that the Spirit of God can work through us?

Action

Read about one of your saints today. It could be a saint we honor as church or it could be a contemporary saint who has made a real difference today. What one trait from that life can you practice in your today? Do it.

Prayer

Lord, help me to surrender to your will. Make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Day 12: Wednesday, September 5th

He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them.

Luke 4: 39

"I have stopped with particular emotion at the small church of San Damiano where Francis heard from the crucifix the directive "Go, Francis, and rebuild my church" . It was a mission that would start with the full conversion of his heart and would, in turn, become Gospel leaven handed in abundance to the Church and society."

Pope Benedict XVI in Assisi, June 19, 2007

Reflection

We need to be more conscious of God acting in our lives. God is always there with and for us. Spend time reflecting on the Presence of God in your life. Do you have a deep sense of gratitude for this Presence? That type of gratitude allows us to truly cultivate peace.

Action

First, take a moment and truly thank God for what God has done for you. Find one good thing you could do today, something you would not ordinarily do, and do it out of a sense of gratitude for the goodness of God in your life.

Prayer

Lord, may my heart overflow with gratitude for your goodness in my life. Amen.

Day 13: Thursday, September 6th

Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. Luke 5: 5-6

“With the Holy See and bishops from the Middle East and around the world, we fear that resort to war, under present circumstances and in light of current public information, would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching for overriding the strong presumption against the use of military force.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Statement on Iraq, November 13, 2002

Reflection
The disciples were able to suspend what they knew from their practical experience and trust in Jesus. How well do we trust in Jesus’ way as individuals? As communities? As a nation? As a world? What would be different?

Action
Get in touch with Catholic statements on the war by visiting www.usccb.org. Reflect on these. Tell one other person about your reflections. Together take action.

Prayer
Lord, so much of what we do comes out of fear. Help us to surrender to you and trust that good will triumph. Amen.

Day 14: Friday, September 7th

But when the days come that the groom is removed from their midst, they will truly fast in those days.
Luke 5:35

Anger is a desire for revenge. "To desire vengeance in order to do evil to someone who should be punished is illicit," but it is praiseworthy to impose restitution "to correct vices and maintain justice." [95] If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbor, it is gravely against charity; it is a mortal sin. The Lord says, "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment."
#2302, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reflection
Fasting does have a purpose. It teaches us patience, right order, and what is worthwhile and lasting. It allows us to develop the ability to not act out of impulse, but to step back and consider carefully how to react. It helps us create an inner peace.

Fasting is not only from food, but from attitudes, practices, words, or actions that are connected to justice and right order within ourselves and in society. How well do you fast?

Action
Even if you have not been fasting the Fridays of this 40 days, fast today for peace.

Prayer
Lord, teach me your ways. Amen.

Day 15: Saturday,September 8th
Birth of Mary

Mary was born to be the mother of the Savior of the world, the spiritual mother of all people, and the holiest of God's creatures. In Mary all human nature is exalted. We rejoice in her birthday, as the Church has done from the earliest times.

St. Augustine connects Mary's birth with Jesus' saving work. He tells the earth to rejoice and shine forth in the light of her birth. "She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley. Through her birth the nature inherited from our first parents is changed."

The opening prayer at Mass speaks of the birth of Mary's Son as the dawn of our salvation and asks for an increase of peace.

Reflection

Mary is the model of discipleship. How well do you respond with a yes to God’s voice in your life? How can you become more open to that voice?

Action

Sit in silent prayer. Just let God speak to you today.

Prayer

Lord, let me hear! Amen.

Day 16: Sunday, September 9th

"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

These are hard words about priorities The call is that of Jesus, but the decision is ours. We decide how we journey through life. Commitment is real only if it is freely made, knowing that it will not be easy. Possessions are more than what we have. They include our attitudes, our belief system, our comfort level, our friends, etc. Renouncing our possessions is more powerful when we need to renounce ingrained attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs. We may need to let go of our individual needs for the sake of the common good.

Reflection: What attitudes are standing in my way of being open to the way of Jesus? How do I feel about people who are different- either culturally or religiously? How well do I listen to another perspective on issues?

Action: Speak out about an issue in some way this week: 1. Explain the issue to ten friends and take action together and 2. Write a letter to your senators or representatives.

Prayer

Lord, grant us the courage and humility we need: courage to be different and humility to know we cannot go it alone. Amen.

Day 17: Monday, September 10th

Jesus said to them [Pharisees], “I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath – or evil? To preserve life – or destroy it?”

Luke 6: 9

Deliberate *hatred* is contrary to charity. Hatred of the neighbor is a sin when one deliberately wishes him evil. Hatred of the neighbor is a grave sin when one deliberately desires him grave harm. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

#2303, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reflection

We can get so caught up in our view or our way especially as reflected in our laws, that we forget that the real question is about life and what is good for all God’s children. How do you make decisions of right and wrong? Are you capable of loving those you consider enemies?

Action

Read about a young volunteer who put love into action and became a victim of the war. Go to http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/nationworld/2002245634_volunteer19.html

Write your reflections on this story as it relates to the Way of Jesus. Share it with a friend.

Prayer

Lord, help us to love our enemies. Amen.

Day 18: Tuesday, September 11th

Then he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God.

Luke 6: 12

Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic "Prince of Peace." [100] By the blood of his Cross, "in his own person he killed the hostility," [101] he reconciled men with God and made his Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. "He is our peace." [102] He has declared: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

#2305, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reflection

True peace is found in a deep relationship with God. How much time do you take to pray? Do you leave time for quiet so that you can hear the voice of God?

Action

Take extra time today to pray. Try sitting quietly in the presence of God. Journal about your experience.

Prayer

Today, just be in silence. Listen.

Day 19: Wednesday, September 12th
Most Holy Name of Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary always points us to God, reminding us of God's infinite goodness. She helps us to open our hearts to God's ways, wherever those may lead us. Honored under the title "Queen of Peace," Mary encourages us to cooperate with Jesus in building a peace based on justice, a peace that respects the fundamental human rights (including religious rights) of all peoples.

Reflection
Can I truly pray this prayer as mine?

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden,
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm:
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree.
He has filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich He has sent empty away.
He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy;
As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever.

Action and Prayer
Pray the Magnificat several times today. See where it leads you.

Day 20: Thursday, September 13th
St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom, born in Antioch about 347 A.D., was a great genius. His powerful eloquence earned him the surname of Chrysostom, or golden mouthed. As Archbishop of Constantinople, his courageous stance against the vices of even the wealthy caused him to be exiled several times. As a result he died in 407, still in exile.

Those who renounce violence and bloodshed and, in order to safeguard human rights, make use of those means of defense available to the weakest, bear witness to evangelical charity, provided they do so without harming the rights and obligations of other men and societies. They bear legitimate witness to the gravity of the physical and moral risks of recourse to violence, with all its destruction and death.
#2306, Catechism of the Catholic Church

Reflection

Bearing witness to the truth of the gospel does get us in trouble. How willing are you to speak the truth, even when it is contrary to prevailing society?

Action
Human trafficking is a little talked about issue. Plan on attending the presentation September 20th at the HM Ministry Center, 20015 Detroit Road, Rocky River, from 6:30-8:30 PM. For more information, call 440-356-5707.

Prayer
Lord, teach me ways to work for the respect for all human beings. Amen

Day 21: Friday, September 14
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

This feast commemorates the recovery of the Holy Cross, which had been placed on Mt. Calvary by St. Helena and preserved in Jerusalem, but then had fallen into the hands of Chosroas, King of the Persians. The precious relic was recovered and returned to Jersualem by Emperor Heralius in 629. Emperor Heraclius carried the Cross back to Jerusalem on his shoulders. He was clothed with costly garments and with ornaments of precious stones. But at the entrance to Mt. Calvary a strange incident occurred. Try as hard as he would, he could not go forward. The Emperor then put on a penitential garb and continued the journey.

Reflection: We made the Sign of the Cross before prayer which helps to fix our minds and hearts to God and after prayer to keep close to God. At Baptism we are sealed with the Sign of the Cross, signifying the fullness of redemption and that we belong to Christ. Let us look to the cross frequently, and realize that when we make the Sign of the Cross we give our entire self to God — mind, soul, heart, body, will, thoughts. Do our lives reflect that surrender?

Action: Today, go out of your way to include someone who is not in your circle of friends in some activity. Visit a shut-in. Put a face on poverty, HIV-Aids , or abused children. Let that face touch your heart. And do fast.

Prayer

O cross, you are the glorious sign of victory.
Through your power may we share in the triumph of Christ Jesus.

Day 22: Saturday, September 15
Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows

This feast dates back to the 12th century. In 1482 the feast was added to the Missal under the title of "Our Lady of Compassion." The title "Our Lady of Sorrows" focuses on Mary's intense suffering during the passion and death of Christ. "The Seven Dolors," the title by which it was celebrated in the 17th century, referred to the seven swords that pierced the Heart of Mary. This feast is dedicated to the spiritual martyrdom of Mary, Mother of God, and her compassion with the sufferings of her Divine Son, Jesus. In her suffering as co-redeemer, she reminds us of the tremendous evil of sin and shows us the way of true repentance. The seven sorrows of Mary are: The prophecy of Simeon *(Luke 2:25-35)*, The flight into Egypt *(Matthew 2:13-15)*, Loss of the Child Jesus for three days *(Luke 2:41-50)*, Mary meets Jesus on his way to Calvary *(Luke 23:27-31; John 19:17)*, Crucifixion and Death of Jesus *(John 19:25-30)*, The body of Jesus being taken from the Cross *(Psalm 130; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-37)*, The burial of Jesus *(Isaiah 53:8; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42; Mark 15:40-47).*

Reflection: Close your eyes and see the faces of the mothers who have lost children to violence through war, disease, famine, genocide, and slavery. Cry their tears.

Action: Take any action that those faces inspire in order to end violence.

Prayer: May the numerous tears of the Mother of God become our tears as well. May they move us to act on the behalf of all mothers. Amen.

Day 23: Sunday, September 16th

"Let us eat and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found." Then the celebration began.

Luke 15: 23b-24

This is a good week to ask ourselves where we need to repent. Every so often, we need to be told we can change. What has gone before will be completely forgiven and we can start fresh. We can acknowledge that we do need to change our attitudes. We can acknowledge that we haven't been good about taking action on injustice, that we haven't been very inclusive and welcoming.

Reflection

Who are the lost of our world? Am I willing to celebrate their inclusion in our family? Do I see the victims of war and genocide, of failed immigration law, of human trafficking, and of poverty as family for whom I must care?

In this section of Luke, we are also asked to look at our corporate selves. How are our communities and nation like the Pharisaic attitudes portrayed here? What can we do to change that?

Action

Take action on one more issue this week. Let your voice be heard.

Prayer

Lord, forgive my inaction. Amen.

Day 24: Monday, September 17th

St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was born in Montepulciano, Italy, and died in Rome. The son of noble parents, he entered the Society of Jesus, finishing his theological studies at Louvain, Belgium. His services to the Church were outstanding and many. He occupied the chair of controversial theology in Rome. He defended the Holy See against anti-clericals. He wrote books against the prevailing heresies of the day. His catechism, translated into many languages, spread the knowledge of Christian doctrine to all parts of the world. As a religious he was a model of purity, humility and obedience; as a bishop and Cardinal, an example of great love for his flock.

Reflection

The key to Robert Bellarmine was his purity, humility, and obedience along with great love for the people of God. How would others describe you? Can others tell by the way you live what your values are?

Action

Obtain a yard sign that says, "Pray for Peace and Nonviolence," and display in prominently. This could be your front yard or the back window of your car.

Prayer

Lord, guide me in living with an integrity to gospel values. Amen.

Day 25: Tuesday, September 18th

The Lord was moved to pity upon seeing her and said to her, “Do not cry.” Luke 7:13

Respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace can not be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is "the tranquility of order."[98] Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.

#2304, Cathechism of the Catholic Church

Reflection

When we look at the miracle stories, we see that it was Jesus coming in contact with those most in need of help that moved him to action. We, too, are more likely to take action if we see the faces of those in need, especially the children.

How isolated am I from the most vulnerable in society? What can I do to put real faces on the issues?

Action

Plan to attend, ***The children Left Behind: AIDS Orphans Around the World***, an exhibit sponsored by Catholic relief Services at John Carroll University. For more information, contact Deacon Rocky Ortiz, 440-245-5043.

Prayer

Lord, open my eyes to their faces. Amen.

Day 26: Wednesday, September 19th

God’s wisdom is vindicated by all who accept it.

Luke 7: 35

In his first General Audience on April 27, 2005, in St. Peter's Square, it was significant that the Pope chose to explain his decision [his name] this way: "Filled with sentiments of awe and thanksgiving, I wish to speak of why I chose the name Benedict. Firstly, I remember Pope Benedict XV, that courageous prophet of peace, who guided the Church through turbulent times of war. In his footsteps I place my ministry in the service of reconciliation and harmony between peoples."

Reflection

There are many who thought Pope Benedict XVI would break with Pope John Paul II on matters of war. When his condemnation of the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in the Summer of 2006 was made, everyone knew he would be tough on war. The truth of the peace and nonviolence of Jesus is being accepted by more and more. Am I truly aware of the tradition of nonviolence in the church? Do I practice nonviolence in my daily life?

Action

Reflect on nonviolence in your life. Look at your language, as well as your actions.

Prayer

Lord, teach me the ways of nonviolence. Amen.

Day 27: Thursday, September20th
Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang and Companions

During the 17th century the Christian faith was brought to Korea through the zeal of lay persons. From the very beginning these Christians suffered terrible persecutions and many suffered martyrdom during the 19th century. Today's feast honors a group of 103 martyrs. Notable of these were Andrew Kim Taegon, the first Korean priest, and the lay apostle, Paul Chong Hasang. Also among the Korean martyrs were three bishops and seven priests, but for the most part they were heroic laity, men and women, married and single of all ages.

Reflection

What is important to note about today's commemoration is the fact that lay people made areal difference – first, through the initial conversion, and, then, through their total witness, to the point of martyrdom. How zealous are you abut the gospel? Is it to the point of bringing people together to make a real difference?

Action

Gather a group of people together and use either the prayer and discussion guide for small meetings or the beginning of meetings or the prayer vigil for peace. Both can be downloaded from our web site, www.catholic-action.org. Find a way the group can take action on one of the issues.

Prayer
Lord, help my unbelief! Guide me in witnessing to your Word. Amen.

Day 28: Friday, September 21st
Feast of Matthew, Evangelist

At the time that Jesus summoned him to follow Him, Matthew was a publican, that is, a tax-collector for the Romans. No one was more shunned by the Jews than a publican, who was a Jew working for the Roman enemy by robbing his own people and making a large personal profit. Publicans were not allowed to trade, eat, or even pray with others Jews.

One day, while seated at his table of books and money, Jesus looked at Matthew and said two words: "Follow me." This was all that was needed to make Matthew rise, leaving his pieces of silver to follow Christ. His original name, "Levi," in Hebrew signifies "Adhesion" while his new name in Christ, Matthew, means "Gift of God."

Reflection
Reflect on how big an impression Jesus made on Matthew that he just left everything and followed him. Have you really gotten to know Jesus? What stands in the way? What do you need to do to have a deeper relationship, one that changes your life?

Action
Read Matthew's chapters on the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and then read about the themes of Catholic Social Teaching. Answer the question: What are you urged to do? And do fast.

Prayer
Spend silent time with Jesus. Just image him sitting with you.

Day 29: Saturday, September22nd
St. Wenceslaus' St. Lawrence Ruiz and Companions

St. Wenceslaus was Duke of Bohemia, who after many trials in governing and evangelizing his people, suffered martyrdom at the hands of his brother.

In the 17th century (1633-1637) St. Lawrence Ruiz and his companions shed their blood for Christ in Nagasaki, Japan. These martyrs were members of the Order of St. Dominic. They were nine priests, two religious, two sisters, and three laymen. Among the latter was Lawrence Ruiz, a family man from the Philippines. They abundantly sowed the missionary seed of Christianity with the example of their life and death.

Martyrs remind us that violence is the way of fear.

Iin that speech (University of Regensburg. Sept. 12, 2006 speech), when Pope Benedict said, "Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul," he wasn't just talking about terrorism. He was also talking about the response to terrorism.

Reflection: How do you really view violence? Is it always wrong, or, are there times when it is the way? What are the results of all violence?

Action: Go to www.savedarfur and take action against the genocide in Darfur.

Prayer
Lord, help me to see that there are other means than violence to resolve conflicts. Amen.

Day 30: Sunday, September 23rd

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or be attentive to the one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money. Luke 16: 13

This week we look at what kind of stewards of our world we are**.** Wealth could be power, influence, leverage, reputation, abilities and skills, creativity, and everything we admire as an American society. When we expand our concept of wealth, the parable takes on new meaning. We very easily manage our own abilities, etc. to conform to what we see as beneficial to us and our family.

Reflection

Who is my master? What changes do I need to make in my life in order to truly live the gospel, especially in caring for victims of poverty, war, genocide, human trafficking, HIV-Aids, lack of comprehensive immigration reform?

Action
Catholic Social Teaching gives us guidance on this with the themes of life and dignity of the human person, the option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, rights and responsibilities, and the call to family, community, and participation. Apply these themes to one of the issues. Look at your priorities, your practices, your attitudes, and your actions. Become the voice of the powerless in regard to one area.

Prayer
Lord, guide me in putting you first. Let me trust that all else will fall into place. Amen.

Day 31: Monday, September 24th

No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket or under a bed; he puts it on a lamp stand so that whoever comes in can see it. Luke 8: 16

"Before all else, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my predecessors, the great popes Paul VI and John Paul II, who were astute promoters of peace. Guided by the spirit of the Beatitudes, they discerned in the many historical events which marked their respective pontificates the providential intervention of God, who never ceases to be concerned for the future of the human race. As tireless heralds of the Gospel, they constantly invited everyone to make God the starting-point of their efforts on behalf of concord and peace throughout the world. " Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection
Is your faith and your beliefs obvious? Are they on a lamp stand for all to see? If not, why not?

Action
Spend some honest time reflecting on what you believe and how you live those beliefs. Make a list of how you can do a better job of being a light to the world. Then, choose one action you could take.

Prayer
Lord, guide me into becoming a light for you in this world. Amen.

Day 32: Tuesday, September 25th

"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it." Luke 8: 21b

The theme chosen for this year's reflection – "In truth, peace' – expresses the conviction that wherever and whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendor of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace. The pastoral constitution "Gaudium et Spes," promulgated forty years ago at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, stated that mankind will not succeed in "building a truly more human world for everyone, everywhere on earth, unless all people are renewed in spirit and converted to the truth of peace." . Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection
Peace will not happen until we truly believe that Jesus showed us the way of peace and become his disciples. Too many of us find this unrealistic for our world and never take the first steps. Where are you? What are you doing?

Action
Today, spend time with inner peace. What are your fears? Let the gospels open to any page and read the passages there. What do they say to you?

Prayer
Shepherd me, O Lord, from death into life. Amen.

Day 33: Wednesday, September 26th
Sts. Cosmas and Damian

The only thing we know about Sts. Cosmas and Damian is that they suffered martyrdom in Syria during the Roman persecution of Diocletian, around 303 A.D. Tradition says they were twin brothers and medical doctors, and have been honored since the 6th century. These brothers never charged a fee for their medical services.

"Peace is an irrepressible yearning present in the heart of each person, regardless of his or her particular cultural identity. Consequently, everyone should feel committed to service of this great good, and should strive to prevent any form of untruth from poisoning relationships. All people are members of one and the same family."

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection: Today's saints are great examples of working from their hearts. They were not concerned about maximizing their wealth, but meeting the needs of others. Where are our priorities as individuals? As communities? As a nation? What are the base concerns you are hearing about immigration reform? What do these concerns reflect?

Action: Revisit the issues around comprehensive immigration reform. Visit the web sites www.catholiccharitesusa.org and www.justiceforimmigrants.org. Open your heart and write your congressman about the need for fair and just reform.

Prayer: Lord, may my heart be opened to all. Amen.

Day 34: Thursday, September 27th
St. Vincent DePaul

St. Vincent de Paul (1576 - 1660) was born in Gascony, France, and died in Paris. As a young priest he fell into the hands of Mohammedan pirates who carried him off to Africa. After his return to France he became successively parish priest, grand almoner of the galley slaves, and spiritual director of the Visitation nuns. He founded the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission or Lazarists to preach especially to country people. With the help of Louise de Marillac he established the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity to care for young girls, for the needy, sick, and foundlings.

"Peace thus comes to be seen in a new light: not as the mere absence of war, but as a harmonious coexistence of individual citizens within a society governed by justice, one in which the good is also achieved, to the extent possible, for each of them."
Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection: One component of peace has to do with meeting the basic needs of people. In Catholic Social Teaching, we refer to that theme as the option for the poor. Having the ability to take of oneself and one's family is about basic human dignity. How aware are you of how people are stripped of their dignity through human trafficking? Through lack of a homeland?

Action: Senate Resolution 224 affirms the two state solution with "the State of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security." Contact your Senators at Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. For more information , visit www.usccb.org or www.crs.org.

Prayer: Lord, guide me in ways of being a voice for human dignity, especially for the voiceless.

Day 35: Friday, September 28th
St. Wenceslaus, St. Lawrence Ruiz and Companions

St. Wenceslaus was Duke of Bohemia, who after many trials in governing and evangelizing his people, suffered martyrdom at the hands of his brother.

In the 17th century (1633-1637) St. Lawrence Ruiz and his companions shed their blood for Christ in Nagasaki, Japan. They were nine priests, two religious, two sisters, and three laymen. Among the latter was Lawrence Ruiz, a family man from the Philippines.

"The truth of peace calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word. In a particular way, the followers of Christ, recognizing the insidious presence of evil and the need for that liberation brought by the divine Master, look to him with confidence, in the knowledge that "he committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (1 Peter 2:22; cf. Isaiah 53:9)."
Pope Benedict XVI – World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection: Do you cultivate faith relationships? Do you have a spiritual support group? If not, could you start one?

Action: Step outside you usual circle of friends and make a new friend – of a different culture, different religion, different socio-economic group. You may have to go outside your neighborhood to do so. And do fast today.

Prayer: Lord, teach me how to truly welcome the stranger and the newcomer.

Day 36: Saturday, September 29th
Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael

The name of the archangel Michael means, in Hebrew, *who is like unto God?* and he is also known as "the prince of the heavenly host."
His name appears in Scripture four times, twice in the Book of Daniel, and once each in the Epistle of St. Jude and the Book of Revelation.

St. Gabriel's name means "God is my strength". Biblically he appears three times as a messenger. He had been sent to Daniel to explain a vision concerning the Messiah. He appeared to Zachary to foretell the birth of his son, St. John the Baptist. St. Gabriel is most known as the angel chosen by God to be the messenger of the Annunciation, to announce to mankind the mystery of the Incarnation.

Archangel Raphael's mission as wonderful healer and fellow traveler with the youthful Tobias has caused him to be invoked for journeys and at critical moments in life. Tradition also holds that Raphael is the angel that stirred the waters at the healing sheep pool in Bethesda. His name means "God has healed".

Reflection
Today, we celebrate the messengers of God. We, too, are called to be messengers. How are you a messenger of God's truth?

Action
Join the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The campaign's intention is to create the political will for comprehensive immigration reform. For detailed information and resources on the campaign, visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org. Get ten of your friends to join.

Prayer
Lord, grant me the courage to be the messenger of your Word. Amen.

Day 37: Sunday, September 30th

Abraham said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if one should rise from the dead." Luke 16:31

Ah, woe to the complacent! Even inaction is an action. When we refuse to "get involved" or find the issues too far away, we pay the consequences of letting poverty remain, of wars started, of people dying from lack of good drinking water or HIV-Aids, or life as usual with employers and undocumented immigrants. So often, we are that rich man who refuses to see the beggar at our gate. The Catholic Charities Office of Migration and Refugees is having problems finding help for some of the new refugees because they are "not like us."

Peace is about loving the unlovable. Peace is about loving those we consider our enemies.

Reflection

Who is the beggar at our gate who we are ignoring? How can we change this? What can you do personally to reach out to someone different in need?

Action

Visit our Diocesan web site, www.catholic-action.org, or the Catholic Charities site, www.catholiccharitiesusa.org, for information on issues and actions you can take. Both web sites also have links to others.

Prayer

Lord, that I might seethe beggar and reach out. Amen.

Day 38: Monday, October 1st
St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Today is the memorial of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, more popularly known as "the Little Flower." Although just an obscure cloistered Carmelite nun, she has had universal appeal since her death in 1897. She gave us the little way of love. We don't have to perform great acts, just be ;loving in little ways, every day with everyone. St. Thérèse is the patroness of all foreign missions and patroness of France.

"At the same time I ask for an increase of prayers, since peace is above all a gift of God, a gift to be implored incessantly. By God's help, our proclamation and witness to the truth of peace will be all the more convincing and illuminating."

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection

Today's saint was very aware of the power of prayer and the influence of small actions. She attained a very high degree of holiness by carrying out her ordinary daily duties with perfect fidelity, having a childlike confidence in God's providence and merciful love and being ready to be at the service of others at all times. Are you faithful in the little things?

Action

Pray daily for the safety of our military personnel, a just end to the war in Iraq, a peaceful transition for the Iraqi people and a commitment by the international community to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq.

Prayer

Lord, grant me the grace to follow the little way of love. Amen.

Day 39: Tuesday, October 2nd

Angels are servants and messengers from God. "Angel" in Greek means messenger. In unseen ways the angels help us on our earthly pilgrimage by assisting us in work and study, helping us in temptation and protecting us from physical danger. The idea that each soul has assigned to it a personal guardian angel has been long accepted by the Church. From the Gospel of today's liturgy we read: "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

"For her part, the Church, in fidelity to the mission she has received from her Founder, is committed to proclaiming everywhere "the Gospel of peace." In the firm conviction that she offers an indispensable service to all those who strive to promote peace, she reminds everyone that, if peace is to be authentic and lasting, it must be built on the bedrock of the truth about God and the truth about man."

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection

At what times have you been an "angel" to someone? In how many more ways can you be an angel?

Action

Take a collection to support the Diocesan Council on Global Solidarity's partnership with two Catholic schools in Tanzania. Go to www.catholic-action.org to find out more.

Prayer

Lord, may I be your angel. Amen.

Day 40: Wednesday, October 3rd

Whoever puts his hand to the plow but keeps looking back is unfit for the reign of God. Luke 9: 62

"At the conclusion of this message, I would like to address a particular word to all believers in Christ, inviting them once again to be attentive and generous disciples of the Lord. When we hear the Gospel, dear brothers and sisters, we learn to build peace on the truth of a daily life inspired by the commandment of love. Every community should undertake an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace. At the same time I ask for an increase of prayers, since peace is above all a gift of God, a gift to be implored incessantly."

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace, 2006

Reflection: It is our choice. We can sit idly by and let the world pass us by – yet, pay the consequences of others' decisions, or we can become a voice. We need to ground that voice in the gospel. We need to understand Catholic Social Teaching. And we have to have faith that we are not alone, God walks every step with us on this gospel journey to peace. It is not a clear, easy journey. **So, where are you?**

Action: Visit any of the web sites listed. Learn more. Take action. Visit www.catholic-action.org and download the list of actions we have suggested. Attend some of the special programs and exhibits list.

Prayer: Lord, be my guide! Amen.

Celebrate The Feast of St. Francis in a new way!!!

Plan to attend the Mass for Peace, Human Rights and Solidarity to be celebrated by Bishop Richard G. Lennon on October 4, 2007 (Feast of St. Francis of Assisi) at 12 Noon at St. John's Cathedral in Cleveland.

Helpful Web Sites

Diocesan Social Action Office: www.catholic-action.org

Catholic Charities USA: www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

Bread for the World: www.bread.org

NETWORK: www.networklobby.org

Catholic Relief Services: www.crs.org

Catholics for an End to the War in Iraq: www.catholicsforanend.org.

US Catholic Conference: www.usccb.org

SaveDarfur: www.savedarfur.org

Justice for Immigrants: www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Pax Christi USA: www.paxchristiusa.org

The Papal Agency in the Middle East www.cnewa.org

The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, www.hcef.org