Seven Liturgical Celebrations to Pray for Peace

Six Weekend Liturgies and the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

One simple way to participate in this time of prayer, fasting and action for peace is to dedicate the Sunday liturgies from August 25th to the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi to the cause of peace. Included in this section are aids to help you: comments on the Sunday readings and how they relate to this prayerful time, bulletin announcements to spark discussion and reflection, bulletin inserts to guide the prayer and action of parishioners, and prayers of the faithful. These can be used alone as the only parish effort or combined with the other levels of involvement contained in this booklet.

Let us together as church pray for peace in our lives, in our communities, in our nation, and in our world.

August 25/26, 2007

Isaiah 66:18-21 The Lord comes to gather nations of every language. The glory of God is to be found in God's relationship with all God's creation. Isaiah visions all God's peoples worshiping and witnessing the glory of God.

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13 We are children of God. But our world is filled with trials and suffering. We need to look to the good that does eventually come from that suffering.

Luke 13: 22-30 Entrance is through the narrow door. Who will enter the Kingdom of god will surprise us – not the expected.

Comments:

Jesus is continuing on his way to Jerusalem. In his teaching along the way, we go from the narrow door to the image of infinite doors (coming from east and west, north and south) with some of the last becoming first. So, what does this have to do with Catholic Social Teaching?

- The presence of God's reign requires a faith response. We are called not to become mired in worldly values, but to take the prophetic stance and not only proclaim, but live the Reign of God. Our relationship with God grounds our being in gospel values and we must trust in this reign. Our fears of strangers (immigrants, refugees, the poor) and our inability to live with a sense of abundance and gratitude have dictated many policies that alienate others. We need to trust and welcome the stranger. That's where the peace of Christ is found.
- It is God's narrow gate, not ours. Long-held assumptions are challenged. People and nations from east and west, north and south, will enter. We make a lot of assumptions about who we are as a nation. These assumptions need to be looked at with an open mind and in reflection upon the gospel.
- We are being told that this is a time of opportunity. It is never too late to experience metanoia, a conversion of heart. On all the issues, responsible transition in Iraq, human trafficking, the Middle East, immigration, Darfur, response to terrorism etc., the gate is narrow and the call of the Gospel is difficult and prophetic. But that is where we find peace.

September 1 / 2, 2007

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29 Humility is a key virtue. The Kingdom of God turns our world upside-down: it is the humble person who is great. The humble person understands and accepts the limits of one's abilities.

Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24a Jesus mediates a new covenant. Jesus' blood saves all.

Luke 14: 1, 7-14 Humility is key again. We don't assume a high place, but start at the lowest and wait to be invited to a better position. Invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame to your banquet – the Kingdom is about relationship with the lowest and most vulnerable.

Comments:

We often forget that Jesus turns worldly values upside-down. The poor and most vulnerable are the most important – the option for the poor in Catholic Social Teaching. This parable looks at proper perception. When we try to judge others, we actually become the one judged.

- This is a reminder that social justice has two feet: charity and advocacy. We are not called to charity here, but to a wider, more inclusive sense of community. That, ultimately is the greatest advocacy: inclusion in a caring community.
- Inclusion into community is accepting people as they are – issues of human dignity and respect. It is a willingness to accept those who do not think like us, who are of a different culture, who have been displaced, abused, or harmed in some way.
- Inclusion into the world community is understanding that our way is not the only way. We need to also look at the way we try to initiate change.
- Inclusion in community is about speaking up for the voiceless in nonviolent ways. If we want peace, as Pope Paul VI stated, we must work for justice: responsible transition in Iraq, a Middle East resolution that respects all peoples involved, a peaceful end to the genocide in Darfur, and an end to human trafficking.
- If we want peace, then we need to model nonviolent conflict resolution. We can start this in our everyday lives.

September 8/9, 2007

Wisdom 9: 13-18b We cannot know the way of the Lord.

Philemon 9b-10, 12-17 Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as family, not as property. It is up to Philemon.

Luke 14:25-33 Renouncing possessions for the sake of Christ is difficult but necessary. We must take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Comments:

The call is that of Jesus, but the decision is ours. We decide how we journey through life. Comment is real only if it is freely made, knowing that it will not be easy. If we are to obtain peace, we need courage and humility: courage to be different and humility to know we cannot go it alone.

- 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.** Jesus is about the common good – a phrase we actually heard more about in the last election season. When we work toward the common good, we have a better chance at peace. When we remain focused on ourselves, we invite conflict.
- Discipleship involves: focus on the larger community rather than the narrower family, letting go of self-service for the sake of commitment to the service of God, and reliance on God's resources and control rather than ours. It is trust that God's way will bring about peace.
- There is a radical cost to this commitment. But, we need to be open to the Spirit. We need to also trust that the wisdom of God is reflected in our being Church. Therefore, we do rely on being in community and the authority of the Church to gain insight and to take positions. Ultimately, it is our conscience and our commitment.

September 15/16, 2007

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14 Moses intercedes for the people who have turned away from God with the golden calf. Moses begs God to spare the Israelites.

1 Timothy 1:12-17 Paul refers to his conversion. When we are open to conversion, God's work can be done through us.

Luke 15: 1-32 A mix of images of God is found here**:** Prodigal Father/Son, Good Shepherd, Woman in search of her missing coin. All speak of the concern of God for each and every one of us, but with a focus on the one who is lost.

Comments: 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. In the final story today, there are three models of relationship – and, at times, we have been in the position of all three. Sometimes we need to reflect on those different times so that we can then understand others' perspectives in regard to the issues before us.

War in Iraq and Afghanistan: The views of many Americans have changed. In the shadows of 9/11, the immediate reaction was to chase the terrorist wherever they were and trample governments seen to harbor them. We were told that there were weapons of mass destruction, etc. But new information has come to the fore. Terrorism, by many accounts, has increased. Many, many innocent people have been killed. We have paid a high price in the loss of American lives. Like the bishops who stood against war have said, we cannot go back. We can only go forward – a most difficult forward – in finding a responsible transition.

Genocide in Darfur: It is easy to ignore the genocide in Darfur. We keep hearing of agreements and peacekeeping forces. But, the government of Sudan has not honored any of these. China's money and need for a relationship with Sudan has become an obstacle for peace. We can just acknowledge we haven't been concerned and start to take action now.

Human Trafficking: Here is an issue we consider far from almost all of us - except for the victims.

Immigration: We all know what we have been hearing here. Even the term illegal rather than undocumented says a lot.

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?

September 22/23, 2007

Amos 8:4-7 Denunciation of abuse of the poor. (cheating, trampling, etc.)

1 Timothy 2:1-8 Call for prayers for all authority for the sake of peace.

Luke 16:1-13 The wise steward: what we do in small matters, we will do in larger matters.

Comments:

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. The question, then, is how do we define our interests and our family? Again, we need to broaden those definitions to encompass God's interests and God's family.

The combination of readings for today make it very clear that we are not to trample others in any way. 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. Applying these themes to issues of war and peace with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East, human trafficking, basic needs in Africa, genocide in Darfur, immigration reform, etc. calls us to look at our priorities, our practices, our attitudes, and our actions. We are called to be the voice of the powerless, the poor, those who lack basic necessities, the innocent victims of war. We are called to be a people who respond first with love and compassion.

September 29/30

Amos 6:1a, 4-7 Woe to the complacent!

1 Timothy 6: 11-16 Be righteous; keep the commandments. Seek after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness and a gentle spirit.

Luke 16:19-31 Story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar

Comments:

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." We could not pass any real comprehensive immigration reform, instead focusing on the migrant agricultural workers because it was easier to talk about how they are a drain on our country with many refusing to acknowledge what they contribute to our economy. After 9/11, we were quick to believe the worst about countries who are not like us. There are many examples of people we ignore – but, eventually we do experience the consequences of ignoring them. The resulting situations pose even more difficult problems.

Every week we listen to the example of Jesus. But do we really listen with our hearts? Do we open ourselves to Jesus' way of seeing the world and the people in it? Can we place our trust in God?