

St. Josephine Bakhita Parish - Reflection for *Vigil for Peace* - April 30, 2026
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Reading proclaimed prior to the reflection:
Paul's letter to the Colossians 3: 12 – 17

Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the work of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him.

Song: *Peace. Salam. Shalom.* <Sing together>

How deeply our hearts, our families, our countries, and our world needs peace.

How many times over the past year and more amplified in recent weeks I have heard (and have even said myself): "This is not new." -- "War is not new. Violence is not new." Reacting with violence (whether direct, structural, or cultural) is not new. The USA was built on racist genocide of indigenous communities and on the backs of enslaved people. Domination is not new. Demonization and dehumanization of immigrants is not new. Assassinations/ attempted assassinations, fear-mongering, and voter restrictions: political violence is not new. Polarization is a symptom of a larger problem: that there are forces and powers that benefit from dividing people-- Division is not new. Messages of "stay in your lane" or "focus on theology, not politics" are not only flawed misunderstandings of the commitment of people of faith, but also reflect Nativist and anti-Catholic rhetoric among those in power. This is not new either.

And yet... our opening prayer and reading tonight reminds me that just as much as I hear these comments, I also hear – although it is sometimes just a whisper: "Peace is not new either." "Mercy still exists." "Reconciliation is possible." "Nonviolence is not

new.” (And in fact, nonviolent collective action is statistically on the rise!) “There are still dreams for a new tomorrow.” “Put on love.” Between the rustling of the lectionary pages, I hear: “Do you not see that I make things new?”

[I was invited to share this evening about the peace tradition in the Catholic Church, Pax Christi, some of the recent news in light of our liturgical season... my hope is that some of these reflections might speak to the feelings in the room tonight.]

Pax Christi was founded in 1945, at the end of WW II by a Catholic French laywoman Marthe Dortel Claudot with the full support of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas, both Marthe and Bishop Pierre had been part of the resistance to the German occupation of France, speaking out against their own Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis, and they both vocally opposed the deportation and extermination of the Jewish community. Bishop Pierre was even imprisoned for his views. Marthe’s hope was to gather French and German Catholics (who had been enemies– in WWI and WWII they had killed each other by the millions) to form a movement for prayer, reconciliation, and peace, rooted in Jesus’ command to love one’s enemies. This group eventually crossed borders and last year, Pax Christi International commemorated 80 years as the international Catholic peace movement - a global network of grassroots organisations and communities committed to advancing integral peace through active nonviolence and promoting reconciliation, justice, human dignity, and care for creation. Currently, Pax Christi International has more than 120 member organizations in over 60 countries on five continents, with the fastest growing regions being Africa and Latin America.

Pax Christi began in the United States just over 50 years ago, again thanks to the initiative of a handful of Catholics, mostly lay. At that time, a small group of US Catholics gathered together: Eileen Egan, long-time Catholic Relief Services staff member and sociologist, and historian Gordon Zahn, who had uncovered the story of Austrian conscientious objector Franz Jägerstätter, with several others including Bishop Tom Gumbleton of Detroit– people who were veterans of the anti-war movement, the farmworkers movement and the civil rights movement. This small group would give birth

to Pax Christi USA with Eileen's good friend Dorothy Day and other key Catholic peacemakers.

Today Pax Christi USA is a community of tens of thousands of lay women and men, women religious, priests, deacons, brothers, bishops, Catholics of all stripes and persons affiliated with other faith traditions who strive to be the "peace of Christ, Pax Christi" in the world today. We are a network of individual members and more than 150 local communities — parishes, local groups, high school chapters, college chapters, religious communities, Catholic Worker communities, and others — spread across the United States. In our 50 year history, we've responded using the model of **prayer, study, and action** to call attention to address issues such as nuclear disarmament; US foreign policy and its effects in Latin America, Haiti, and the Philippines; gun violence prevention, war, immigration; the death penalty, indigenous solidarity; care for creation—all with the lenses of the spirituality of nonviolence and anti-racism. Our national office provides these PSA resources, liturgical reflections/booklets, and support for local groups and individual members. (In the narthex of the Church is a table with prayer cards and books from Pax Christi authors.)

Tonight's prayer service came about, just like Pax Christi international and Pax Christi USA — a group of Catholics, reading the "signs of the times" who listened and responded. Catholics who are disturbed by what we are seeing and experiencing — a people shaken up! — MOVED by the Holy Spirit to do something. And to do *that something* in a way consistent with who we are and whose we are as an Easter people. Your presence here tonight is a witness of that Peace of Christ, peace that the world cannot give, and that is a promise of the Risen One who calls us here tonight.

Margaret Mead is attributed to the following quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." *This is our spiritual lineage* - a relatively small group of people following The Way of Jesus of Nazareth, our brother and the one whose life, death, and resurrection shows us the path of nonviolence. Whose messages post-resurrection included "Peace be with

We are now in the ninth week of war with Iran and it suddenly seems as if every Catholic influencer is suddenly an expert on the just war theory. At its core, the just war principles includes checklist of ten criteria to be used in the to wage war, including among other things just cause and noncombatant immunity and that war may only be used when all other ways of achieving peace (such as diplomacy, negotiation...) have failed. These principles are based on the thought of St. Augustine around the year 400.

I doubt St. Augustine could have imagined a leader of a country ever threatening that “A whole civilization will die this evening.”-- much less that it could actually be possible. He probably would never have imagined in his wildest nightmares that humanity would possess a nuclear weapon that could wipe out an entire people (combatants and non combatants alike) and decimate the land – and that they have already been used. I doubt Augustine would also have been able to imagine a country that will spend 1.5 trillion dollars on its armaments and military, while simultaneously cutting healthcare and food accessibility for its own citizens.

We are entirely in a new time from when the origins of the just war tradition began, which has led theologians, philosophers, practitioners, and ministers at the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and the Catholic Institute for Nonviolence in Rome to think more critically about just war tradition– and since Catholic Social Teaching continues to grow deeper, that perhaps what we need now is a just peace model that is not only used at times leading up to the possibility of war, but a model that is applied at all stages of conflict.

This is a theology of peace that embraces the a spirituality of nonviolence and nonviolent action that includes practices of peacemaking: preventing war, developing structures that help peace endure over time, addressing the root causes of violence, reforming and transforming the unjust structures that produce violence, a holistic healing of the wounds of war, and reconciling people at odds with one another and breaking the cycles of violence. It is this version of peace that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King referred to as “The Beloved Community.”

And it is precisely this analysis that Pope Leo XIV speaks of in the prayers and petitions that are sprinkled into the prayer service tonight. Many things he is saying amplify papal messages before him. Popes promoting peace and resisting war is not new either. A few (of the many!) to share for now:

Pope Paul VI: "...never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all [human]kind." (Address to the United Nations, 1965)

Pope John Paul II:

- "War is a defeat for humanity." (*World Day of Peace Message*, 2000).
- "Never again war, which destroys the life of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked the war." (*Centesimus Annus*, n.52)

Benedict XVI: "The peacemaker, according to Jesus' beatitude, is the one who seeks the good of the other, the fullness of good in body and soul, today and tomorrow. From this teaching one can infer that each person and every community, whether religious, civil, educational or cultural, is called to work for peace. Peace is principally the attainment of the common good in society at its different levels, primary and intermediary, national, international and global. Precisely for this reason it can be said that the paths which lead to the attainment of the common good are also the paths that must be followed in the pursuit of peace." (*World Day of Peace Message*, 2013)

Francis:

- "War is madness. ... War destroys. It also ruins the most beautiful work of his hands: human beings." (*Homily marking the 100th Anniversary of WWI*)
- "Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements

and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity.” (*Invocation for Peace*, 8 June, 2014)

- "There is no such thing as a just war: they do not exist!" (*Address to the International Congress*, 18 March, 2022)

So where does this leave us, St. Josephine Bakhita Parish in Columbus, OH, on April 30, 2026? For one possible answer, I'll turn to another American peace hero/shero: Dorothy Day: "As we come to know the seriousness of the situation, the war, the racism, the poverty in our world, we come to realize that things will not be changed simply by words or demonstrations. Rather, it's a question of living one's life in a drastically different way."

Christians have been living "that drastically different way" since Jesus walked the earth. Peacemaking, loving ones enemies, is one of the primary vocations of the Christian. For me, community is what helps me remember that. One of the resources I brought is the *Vow of Nonviolence*. Tens of thousands have taken the [Vow of Nonviolence](#) since it was composed by Eileen Egan and Fr. John Dear. It can be pronounced privately, with a local peace community, as part of a parish liturgy, or any other way that suits you. Many profess the Vow each year as part of their New Year observance. This is just one way that that "drastically different way" can become a reality in our lives:

- The first line of the vow: "Recognizing the violence in my own heart" (vs. thinking violence is only the work of other people/communities/nations/systems) - I need to transform my pain so that I don't transmit it. I am part of violent systems simply by benefiting from a North American context.
- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;

- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

What might it look like for peacemaking and nonviolence to once again (as it was in the Early Christian communities) become a central part of living the Gospel message and our Baptismal promises?

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention that today is the homegoing, the death anniversary, of a great peacemaker: Fr. Dan Berrigan, SJ. He referred to all his peace work as “living in the resurrection.” This is only my second time to your parish; and I now recall that during my first visit, I was so moved by your stained glass window of the empty tomb. Easter resurrection: empty tomb, the courage to face the darkness, the unknown, the fear, the violence... and know that the light will not be overcome by it.

My hope tonight is that even with the reality that “violence is not new,” we can ALSO hear the message: “Peace is still here.” Jesus is risen. I have been called to that peace. We have been called to that peace.

Song: *Peace. Salam. Shalom.* <Sing together>