Blessed Are the Peacemakers

The Roman Catholic Mass and the Transforming Power of Gospel Nonviolence
To Stop Violence and to Build a Just and Lasting Peace
In Our Lives, Our Parishes, Our Communities, and Our World

Ken Butigan, Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service

In the midst of the enormous violence we experience today in our lives, our communities, our city, and our world, Catholics For Nonviolence—an emerging initiative in the Archdiocese of Chicago-invites all Catholics to deepen their awareness and practice of Gospel Nonviolence: Jesus' call for us to love our enemies, our neighbors, ourselves, and our God who loves us unconditionally. To this end Catholics For Nonviolence invites Parish Staffs and groups within a parish to participate in this prayerful reflection to promote and integrate the way of Gospel Nonviolence at every level of the life of the Archdiocese to transform violence within and without and to create just and lasting peace.

Allow approximately 90-minutes for reflection, prayer and discussion.

Discussion Agenda Outline

Music (Optional) (5 min.)
Opening (2 min.)
Introduction (5 min.)
Candle Lighting Ritual (15 min.)
Gospel Reading: “Put Your Sword Back in Its Place” (Matthew 26: 47-56) (3 min.)
Group Reflection on “Put Your Sword Back in Its Place” (15 min.)
Nonviolence and the Gospel (10 min.)
The Mass Celebrates the Nonviolent Way of Jesus (15 min.)
How can we integrate Gospel Nonviolence more into our parish? (15)
Closing: The Catholics for Nonviolence Pledge (5)

Handouts
- The Catholics for Nonviolence Pledge
- Blessed Are the Peacemakers Discussion Questions
- Nancy Shreck, OSF, “The Faithful Nonviolence of Jesus”
- Gospel Nonviolence Workshop, March 16, 2013 flyer
- Pace e Bene flyer

Goals
- To begin to explore the centrality of Gospel Nonviolence in the life and mission of Jesus, including as seen through the lens of the mass;
- To begin to reflect on the power and potential of Gospel Nonviolence in our lives, our parishes, our communities, and our world;
- To begin to envision how our parishes can even more deeply become Nonviolent Communities rooted in Gospel Nonviolence; and
- To begin to think about next steps in our exploration of Gospel Nonviolence.

Supplies
One votive per person and 1 large center candle, matches
Large poster-sized paper, markers and tape or chalkboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers
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**Agenda**

*Please choose a facilitator ahead of time to guide this conversation. The facilitator should review the agenda and prepare music (if desired), candles, and handouts before the discussion takes place. If available, an easel with easel paper can be used to record what people share; if not, the facilitator (or another volunteer) can scribe on notebook paper. Please feel free to tailor this agenda to the needs and contexts of the participants.*

**Music (Optional) (5 min.)**

*If desired, play a track of appropriate recorded music (instrumental or with lyrics) to set a contemplative mood.*

**Opening (2 min.)**

*Please ask a participant to read the following aloud:*

I invite us to listen to the words of the spiritual writer Henri Nouwen as we begin our reflection together on Gospel Nonviolence:

> How can we live in the midst of a world marked by fear, hatred and violence, and not be destroyed by it? When Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples he responds to this question by saying, "I am not asking you to remove them from the world but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world." To live in the world without belonging to the world summarizes the essence of the spiritual life. The spiritual life keeps us aware that our true house is not the house of fear, in which the powers of hatred and violence rule, but the house of love, where God resides.

> Hardly a day passes in our lives without our experience of inner or outer fears, anxieties, apprehensions and preoccupations. These dark powers have pervaded every part of our world to such a degree that we can never fully escape them.

> Still it is possible not to belong to these powers, not to build our dwelling place among them, but to choose the house of love as our home.


**Introduction (5 min.)**

*Facilitator, in her or his own words:*

Welcome to this opportunity to reflect together on the nonviolent way of Jesus and how it relates to our work here in our parish and the larger world. As Henri Nouwen says, we live in a world of great violence, where we are tempted to build a house of fear. Instead Jesus calls us to choose the house of love as our home. Jesus lived this choice for love instead of fear and violence. For the next few minutes we will reflect on this way of nonviolent love in light of scripture, in light of our own experience, and in light of the Roman Catholic Mass, which is a profound meditation on the power and call of Gospel Nonviolence.
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In our time today, we begin an exploration of Gospel Nonviolence, which includes working together to:

- Explore the centrality of Gospel Nonviolence in the life and mission of Jesus, including as seen through the lens of the Mass
- Reflect on the power and potential of Gospel Nonviolence in our lives, our parishes, our communities, and our world
- Envision how our parishes can even more deeply become Nonviolent Communities rooted in Gospel Nonviolence
- Think about next steps in our exploration of Gospel Nonviolence

Candle Lighting Ritual (15 min.)

*Ahead of time assemble a circle of tea lights or small votive candle for each participant.*

As Henri Nouwen said, there is a “dark power” pervading our world and yet our hope lies in the Prince of Peace, the light of the world...Jesus. *(Light the center candle.)*

*Ask people one at a time to come forward to light their small candle with the flame from the “Jesus candle” and share a hope or goal they have for this time of sharing.*

Gospel Reading (3 min.)
Leader: Please stand.

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew *(Matthew 26: 47-56)*

All: Glory to you Lord.

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.”

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?

In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The Gospel of the Lord

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.
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Group Reflection on “Put Your Sword Back in Its Place” (15 min.)

The facilitator asks the large group:

- What are the elements of violence in this passage? Keep a running list.
- Then: What are the elements of Gospel Nonviolence in this passage? Keep a running list.
- When people are finished, read both lists out loud.

Nonviolence and the Gospel (10 min.)

Facilitator posts the definitions of violence and nonviolence below:

**Violence** is any physical, verbal, institutional, or structural behavior, attitude, policy or condition that disrespects, diminishes, dominates, dehumanizes or destroys ourselves or others.

**Nonviolence**, on the other hand, is a force for transformation, justice, and the well-being of all that is neither violent nor passive.

I invite you to brainstorm and share out loud examples from the four Gospels where Jesus is unleashing this power of nonviolent love. What other stories or scripture passages do you recall where Jesus is a “force for transformation, justice and the well-being of all?”

Facilitator writes these down and reads them back to the large group.

Grounded in an inclusive vision where everyone matters, Jesus unleashes this nonviolent power throughout his ministry as he consistently challenges violence and injustice.

- He befriends the rejected
- He feeds the poor
- He challenges purity codes that say some people are more valuable than others
- He heals on the Sabbath.

And he calls on us to do the same: to challenge the violence of injustice, to put the sword down, to love our enemies, and to build the nonviolent Reign of God.

Rooted in Jesus’ call for us to love our enemies, our neighbors, ourselves, and the God who loves us unconditionally, Gospel Nonviolence is a way of life where everyone matters—and a way of transforming the world so that everyone matters.

Facilitator points out list items from the group that match the statements about Gospel nonviolence.

The Mass Celebrates the Nonviolent Way of Jesus (15 min.)

The sacred liturgy of the Mass is the celebration of Jesus’ Way of nonviolent love.

The Mass dramatically brings to the fore the Last Supper when Jesus gathered with his friends and prepared to face being unjustly arrested, tortured and killed. Rather than responding with violence, Jesus called on his followers to put down their sword and then faced the horrendous violence of crucifixion out of love for enemies and in service of the Reign of God.
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His resurrection is a dramatic triumph of nonviolent love over the power of death and violence. When he appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, Jesus did not castigate or retaliate against those who abandoned him. Instead he says, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19-22).

In the Mass we say this to one another, which, following Jesus, is rich with layers of meaning: forgive and reconcile with one another; may the Spirit of the peacemaking Christ be with you; may you be blessed as a peacemaker; may you go into the world and build a world where everyone matters and where none is excluded.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice, a community meal, and a call to imitate Jesus by challenging violence and injustice and, as Pope Benedict XVI says, “seek peace with the means of peace” and become “a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God's love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone.”

Facilitator to the large group:

In what ways do the Mass celebrate—and prepare us to put into practice—Jesus’ nonviolent love?

Facilitator writes these down and reads them back to the large group.

**How Can We Integrate Gospel Nonviolence More into Our Parish? (15 min.)**

Facilitator:

In many ways, our parish has been putting Gospel Nonviolence into practice; at every Mass, in Reconciliation and in every way we bring people together. At the same time, what difference would it make to think more deliberately about this?

Catholics for Nonviolence has a vision of Gospel Nonviolence becoming “archdiocesan-wide and parish deep.” We are seeking to train all archdiocese employees in the vision and practice of Gospel Nonviolence, and to create a Gospel Nonviolence training team in each of the archdiocese’s six vicariates, which would be available to lead trainings, workshops and retreats in their parishes.

Let’s take a few minutes and brainstorm ways we could integrate Gospel Nonviolence more into our parish. **Use the Blessed Are the Peacemakers handout with the discussion questions AND feel free to create your own focus.**

*After a few minutes, please invite people to share their ideas. Write them down. Share the list with the group. Then ask:*

What might be our first steps?

*Write these down and read them back to the group; suggest that these be explored at a future meeting at the parish.*
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After people have shared, let them know that Catholics for Nonviolence is holding a Gospel Nonviolence workshop on Saturday, March 16, 2013, 9:30-4:00 p.m., Holy Family Church, 1080 W. Roosevelt Rd., Chicago. This workshop will offer tools for Gospel-based nonviolent transformation and methods for putting this into practice in our lives and our parishes. To register or for more information, please contact Jennifer Winmuc, staff-person for Lay Ecclesial Ministry at the Chicago Archdiocese at 312-534-5265.

Finally, Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service is available to lead trainings, workshops and retreats for parishes on Gospel Nonviolence. For more information: Ken Butigan at kenbutigan@gmail.com

Closing: The Catholics for Nonviolence Pledge (5 min.)

Invite participants to read the pledge handout together as our closing:

Faithful to the transforming vision of Jesus Christ and no longer willing to accept violence in our homes, in our schools, on our streets, or in our global community:

I pledge to practice Gospel Nonviolence to heal the violence and conflict in our lives, our families, our parishes, our schools, our communities, and throughout all of God’s creation;

I pledge to cultivate peace by proclaiming the Christian message of healing and hope, of renewal and reconciliation, of life and love to all people;

I pledge to address the root causes of violence that continues to affect people throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago so that we can end the cycle of violence and create a more just and peaceful city and world.

Sending

Leader: Go forth and proclaim the Gospel with your lives

All: Thanks be to God
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“Above all we want to make the voice of Jesus heard. He was always a man of peace. It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces. That he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all. He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin anew with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This is Jesus’ true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside.”

-- Pope Benedict XVI, Good Friday, 2011

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How could we more deeply become a Gospel-based Nonviolent Community?

How might an intentional focus on nonviolence strengthen our formation processes?

What kind of Gospel Nonviolence education could we offer to all the members of our parish?

How might this focus strengthen our own ministry?

How would this impact our approach to liturgy and the sacraments?

What kind of programs would we need to create?

Would it be good to have someone on our pastoral team who has expertise in conflict resolution or restorative justice?

How would this impact the work we do in the church and in our larger neighborhood, city and world?

What practical action for change flow from this?
Violence is any physical, verbal, institutional or structural behavior, attitude, policy or condition that disrespects, diminishes, dominates, dehumanizes or destroys ourselves or others.
Nonviolence is a force for transformation, justice, and the well-being of all that is neither violent nor passive.