

Blessed Are the Peacemakers



Christopher News Notes

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.” —St. Francis of Assisi

A PRAYER FOR PEACE CAN TAKE MANY FORMS. For some, peace is an end to the deep conflict within our nation. For others, it’s a moment of silence between their two children fighting over the T.V. remote. No matter the circumstances, peace is a virtue often sought. But what does it mean to truly be at peace? And how can we go about being peacemakers in our world?

First, we need to look at what peace means. In society, peace is described as “freedom from disturbance” or the absence of conflict. But looked at from a deeper perspective, true peace is something that comes from God. In the New Testament, Jesus’ birth was announced as the arrival of peace (or *Eirene* in Greek), because Jesus is peace. This means that “peace” is more than just a state of tranquility; it also implies the presence of the Lord.

Remembering the source of peace helps us on our path towards a better future. As followers of Jesus, we are called to follow His example of humility, patience, and love. By living out these virtues and restoring the faith and love of Jesus in ourselves and our neighbors, we help cultivate a life of peace.

Priest Fosters Peace Between Gangs

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”
—Psalm 34:14

The late 1980s brought what was called the “decade of death” to Los Angeles. Gang-related killings skyrocketed, peaking in 1992 with 1,000 murders. Father Greg Boyle, S.J., was no stranger to the dark side of his city. From 1986 to 1992, he served as pastor of Dolores Mission Church in Boyle Heights, then the poorest Catholic parish in Los Angeles and home to the highest concentration of gang activity in the city.

“I buried my first young person killed because of gang violence in 1988,” Father Boyle writes in his book *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*. He went on to hold funerals for more than 100 victims. Father Boyle knew he wanted to combat this problem, so he decided to pursue a unique tactic: peace through fellowship.

In 1988, his parish began leading programs that offered jobs to gang members. The work ranged from building child care centers to neighborhood clean-ups and graffiti removal. From this, Father Boyle helped open Homeboy Bakery, which hired gang members to make and sell baked goods. Above all, it was an opportunity for former rivals to work side by side and get to know each other as

In *The New York Times*, columnist David Brooks noted that bitter disagreement has become widespread in American culture today. He offered several thoughts on pursuing peace in an angry world.

- “Your narrative will never win. In many intractable conflicts...each side wants the other to...admit it was wrong the whole time. This will never happen...Find a new narrative.”
- “Agree on something. If you’re in the middle of an intractable disagreement, find some preliminary thing you can agree on so you can at least take a step into a world of shared reality.”
- “Gratitude. People who are good at relationships are always scanning the scene for things they can thank somebody for.”
- “Reject either/or. The human mind has a tendency to reduce problems to either we do this or we do that...There are usually many more options neither side has imagined yet.”
- “Presume the good. Any disagreement will go better if you assume the other person has good intentions.”

human beings. “What we’ve come to see as a community is that no kinship, no peace; no kinship, no justice; no kinship, no equality,” Father Boyle said during a talk at the University of San Diego in 2018. “No matter how singularly focused we may well be on those worthy goals, things can’t happen unless there is some undergirding sense that we belong to each other.”

The bakery’s success laid the groundwork for more social enterprise businesses, which eventually led to the creation of Homeboy Industries, the largest and most successful gang intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry program in the country. More than 10,000 former gang members take part in the program every year and make positive changes in their lives.

One of the participants is Jason, who has been in gangs since age 14. He served a 15-year prison term, after which he turned to Homeboy Industries to help him turn away from a life of violence to one of peace and fulfillment. Jason noted that he is making progress, saying, “I believe the dark days I went through allow me to see the light that I see today.”

Apostle of Forgiveness

“He came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”

—Ephesians 2:17

Father Ubald Rugirangoga witnessed the Rwandan

Genocide in 1994. Between April and July, up to 800,000 Rwandans were killed by Ethnic Hutu extremists in a violent 100-day war. The Hutus mainly targeted the minority Tutsi community, and Father Ubald—who is Tutsi—lost 80 family members, including his mother, during the violence. Broken from the brutality, Father Ubald wept every night, until one day, he felt God calling him to leave Rwanda to heal himself and return to help others. After escaping through Congo, Father Ubald landed in France where he prayed and sought healing for six months. The only way out, he found, was through forgiving.

Upon his return to Rwanda, he declared himself an “Apostle of Forgiveness,” held Masses with healing prayers, and organized retreats for victims and perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide. During a prison visit, a man confessed to killing Father Ubald’s mother. The priest forgave the man and even helped put his two children through school.

To continue his mission, Father Ubald founded “The Center for the Secret of Peace” in Rwanda. His works were highlighted in the documentary *Forgiveness: The Secret of Peace*. In 2019, Father Ubald released a book, titled, *Forgiveness Makes You Free*. He spoke about his experiences in a 2013 TEDx Talk in Jackson, Wyoming, noting, “The genocide against the Tutsi people was my cross to carry. Without accepting it as a cross to carry,

nobody can forgive. Forgiveness made me free, and I had to help others to do the same.”

As reported by *Deseret News*, the beloved priest died in January 2021, at the University of Utah Hospital in Salt Lake City, from fibrotic lung disease as a result of catching COVID-19. Despite his passing, his legacy lives on. Those who have been touched by the peacemaking priest’s mission are calling on Father Ubald to be declared a saint.

Mr. Rogers’ Day

Every March, the late Fred Rogers is honored by the U.S. Presbyterian Church with a special holiday: Mr. Rogers’ Day. The Presbyterian minister and Christopher Award-winning host of the television program *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* became a symbol of peace and understanding over the years, and helped to cultivate a sense of community through his show’s mission: to love our neighbor.

Rogers knew that the act of loving others and being a person of peace takes work. Regarding one of his catch phrases, he explained, “When I say, ‘It’s you I like,’ I’m talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.”

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, children and families around the country found a way to

honor their beloved minister. For instance, First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville, North Carolina, held a month-long collection of toys and children’s books that were donated to Finders Keepers Thrift Store and Onslow Women’s Center’s Safe House. Everywhere you looked, there was a message of reaching out to those in need.

Peacemaking and shepherds

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
—Matthew 5:9

Want to be a good peacemaker? Become a shepherd. When St. Teresa of Calcutta—one of the most revered peacemakers of our time—helped start the Missionaries of Charity, her goal was simple but powerful: to work with some of the poorest, most shunned members of Indian society. She washed the sores of sick children, nursed the elderly, and distributed Communion to families living in the nation’s slums. In doing so, she shepherded a small sense of peace into their lives.

Similarly, Archbishop Óscar Romero from El Salvador, boldly spoke out against the injustice of his government during the 1980s. He called out the ignorance of the rich and acts of violence in his country, despite knowing his words put his life in danger. Still, he refused to abandon his people. The reason? Being a good shepherd who is grounded in Christlike love means more than being a leader; it means always caring for your flock out of desire, not obligation. Even when conflict is constant and peace is nowhere in sight, a good shepherd stays and continues to work by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, standing up for those in need, and loving those isolated or alone in their community.

This is the kind of love that Jesus teaches us to have for others, the kind of love that He exhibited in every part of His life. This is the life of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.


“It’s better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”

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“It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt