

Weekly End-of-Summer Reflections on the "Peace Prayer"

Week 1: "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

"Lord" is an address that harkens back to the Middle Ages. Yet, today, that title stands as a translation of "Senior" in Spanish, "Dominus" in Latin. We call out one of the names of our God as we begin this prayer—the most common name in most religions to express reverence for the Source of All Being, for our abundant God.

"Lord" stirs up an image of our Creator God, who is IN all, at the heart of all that is. This is in stark contrast to the lords of our world, those whom we elevate into power; those who grab power from us. (We probably tend to think only of some political men and women. Add also many movie stars, highly-paid athletes, heads of corporations, etc.).

"We believers must over and over again deny the title of 'lord' to earthly lords.... Their power is built up at the cost of impoverishment of vast numbers of people and the systematic pillaging of the resources of the Earth. From a global standpoint, they are producers of death, rather than life."

Summer Prayer

"Oh God, you are the only Lord of our life, our heart, and our destiny. Free us from false lords that deceive us with their promises, for they bring neither life nor peace. Give us strength to resist and to seek peace through justice and the humble service of all men. Amen."

What name for God am I most comfortable with?

Look again (reflect) at that name for God, and find strength and hope in its deeper meaning.

—Adapted from writings of Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian theologian

Week 2: "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

There is a strand (an Energy) running through all beings in creation, and joining them like pearls to form a magnificent necklace. St. Francis and his early followers called this "Christ." It's like a golden thread that holds all life together... When is peace lost? When human beings lose the care and memory of this spiritual connection. Think of hot spots in our world right now: Egypt, Syria, Somalia, Tibet. Consider the political conflicts over immigration reform, use of drones, government monitoring electronic communications, hydraulic fracking. When was the peace lost in each of these situations?

St. Francis was a personal instrument of peace, of the peace that finds Christ in each iota of creation. For ourselves, peace cannot remain a mere empty desire or a

well-meaning intention. It is a radical response—day in and day out—actually being an instrument of peace to the best of our ability.

Summer Prayer

Lord, remove all the obstacles hindering us along the way of your peace—envy, fear of death, and forgetfulness of your presence—by re-connecting all beings. Strengthen in us the energies of love, collaboration, and acceptance so that lasting peace may flourish among us. Amen.

Take time at home daily to pray a bit these last weeks of summer. Turn off electronic distractions, perhaps use a journal, and reflect on today's gospel, in which Jesus tells us, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." What is the message for you about squeezing through this gate and being an instrument of peace? When you make it through, what is on the other side?

—Adapted from writings of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff

Week 3: "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, let me sow pardon.

What makes human, personal, and social life dramatic is the coexistence of love and hatred. Sometimes hatred prevails over love. Persons, groups, and peoples allow the feelings of rejection, exclusion, and death to flourish. Things begin in the heart: that is where prejudice is nourished... Hatred is an overwhelming destructive energy.

Sometimes love prevails over hatred. The heart is tender and loving: attitudes are well-intentioned and welcoming; actions are constructive and in solidarity...

1. Do you use the word "love" haphazardly or intentionally?
2. Any summertime thoughts on this question?

And, injury in our neighbor is so often disguised—masked by unawareness, masked by illusions created by society. There is a dichotomy that each of us must ponder often—when we take the time to reflect—the dichotomy between injurer and injured.... We will then find ourselves on the same human ground from which we must together build a world where there is room for reconciliation and forgiveness, and where mutual care, kinship, solidarity, and mutual respect constitute the permanent foundations for shared life.

3. It is always a good thing to stop and see where you are holding resentments.
4. Where might you desire to sow forgiveness today?

Summer Prayer

Lord, where there is hatred let me sow love. Make us draw out of ourselves the love hidden under the ashes of secret hatreds. May our love for others stir up the love hidden within them that can transform hatred.... Lord, where there is injury, let me sow forgiveness.... Give us strength.... Make us people of solidarity, compassion, and unlimited love. Amen†

—Adapted from writings of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff

Week 4: "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

Where there is doubt, let me sow faith.
Where there is despair, let me sow hope.

There are two types of faith that must be lived out concretely: faith-trust and faith-belief. First comes faith-trust, a stance of complete surrender to Someone Greater, to the creator of the universe.... This radical trust gives us serenity and peace. It dispels all doubts.... Then comes faith-belief, acceptance of God's historic revelation and plan of communion.... This faith-belief settles all doubts about our future....

1. Take time to sit and reflect on your present-day level of faith.

Actual human beings are comprised of various energy centers that give life its dynamic quality: desire, the survival instinct, care, love, capacity for grasping wholes. One of the main energy centers is that of hope, understood not simply as a virtue but as a principle giving rise to many virtues. Hope is the basic energy driving all the others.

We can lose faith, and if we do, the result is a terrifying absence of meaning. But life goes on. We can lose love, and then the luster and joy in living disappear. But people keep going and seek a new love. When we lose hope, however, all reasons for living vanish....

How to sow hope? In the face of situations of injustice, it is concretely engaging against them that we find the grounds for hope. Victorious processes of change—as modest as they might be—always open a new horizon of hope which gives meaning to life and struggle.

2. Take time to sit and reflect on your present-day level of hope.

Summer Prayer

Lord, where there is doubt, let me sow faith. Give us faith—trust which places us in your hands. Grant us faith-belief in your will which seeks to have us united in your kingdom together with all creation.... Lord, where there is despair, may I sow hope. May we be in solidarity with the struggle of those who seek justice. May we know how to create an atmosphere of unlimited confidence in your mysterious design of love. Amen†

—*from the writings of Brazilian theologian Leonard Boff*

Week 5: "Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

Where there is sadness, let me sow joy.
Where there is darkness, let me sow light.

When we started this eight-week reflection, we never would have guessed that during the middle of this month, as we have walked through the Peace Prayer, our world politics would center around sadness and darkness as our country's elected leaders debate bombing another country—and a tally of votes to decide either a violent reaction or dialogue and negotiation.... And no mere chance that it echoes with "9/11" sentiments.

And so, How are we to sow joy? It cannot be sown directly, because joy cannot be given. Joy results from many actions, carried out with a wholesome intention, with care, and with a desire to act rightly in order to bring about change.

What does it mean so sow light where there is darkness? It means having a generous attitude, one imbued with kindness and compassion, able to cast a different light on open wounds.... [It] can mean introducing a living experience of the sacred, a word of wisdom from the spiritual masters of East and West, an inspired text of the Christian scriptures that can transmit an experience of light that reshapes the meaning of life....

Summer Prayer

Grant that my joy may arise out of sincere compassion for those who suffer, true solidarity with those who are wronged, and my own conversion to universal kinship.... Enable me through inspired words, consoling gestures, and a warm heart to dissipate human darkness so that your light may show us the way and bring joy to life. Amen.

Decide what actions you need to take this week regarding these challenges. Check your progress each morning.

And be patient as you do your best at being an instrument of Peace.

—*from the writings of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff*

Week 6: "It Is in Giving that We Receive"

"You cannot serve both God and mammon." (Luke 16:13)

The economy of spiritual goods is different from the economy of material goods. The more you give away material goods—money, land, houses, clothing, and food—the less you have.... The economy of spiritual goods is quite in the reverse. The more we give, the more we receive; the more we surrender, the more we have. The more we love, show solidarity, spread good will, and practice forgivingness, the more we gain as human persons and the greater the esteem we receive.

Thus, giving and receiving are intimately connected. This connection represents the basic logic that governs the operation of the universe and of nature itself. Everything is structured in a most intricate network of relationships, where all exist in one another, giving and receiving mutually where they need to live and develop within a subtle dynamic balance.

—*from the writings of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff*

Summer Prayer

"O Master, grant that we may understand that by giving generously and freely we will also receive all that we need in abundance. May we guide our lives by the generosity that will ever return to us more understanding, more acceptance, and more love. Amen."

Who is worshiped more in our materialistic culture—God or Mammon?

What sort of "giving" does this reflection generate within you?

What are you going to do about "giving" this week?

Week 7: "It Is in Dying that We Are Born to Eternal Life"

On October 3rd, Franciscans throughout the world anticipate the wonderful October 4th feast day of St. Francis with our traditional evening prayer reflection called "Transitus" a memorial honoring the death of St. Francis, imagine the music and prayer in all the

different languages of these Transitus services around the globe.

What are we celebrating honoring a holy man who died 788 years ago?

"Transitus" is a Latin noun which means "passage, crossing." St. Francis died on October 3, 1226 and therefore we highlight his passage, his crossing into the Oneness of the Source of All Being. Quite mystical, yet it's an adventure you, dear reader, will one day journey upon....

Prayer

"Oh Master, teach us to live in such a way that we welcome death as a friend and sister. It does not take away life, but leads to the Fount of all life. Grant that we may be able to recognize in earthly life the beginnings of celestial and eternal life. Amen."

We have completed seven weeks of reflecting on the Peace Prayer. And the author of this prayer has us conclude by pondering our own death. Any insights?

How is today's reflection related to your being an instrument of God's Peace around the globe?