

September 21, World Peace Day

John Dear | Sep. 16, 2008 On the Road to Peace

In 2001, the U.N. General Assembly declared Sept. 21 "International Day of Peace." The declaration called for "a day of global ceasefire and nonviolence," for everyone to promote education and awareness of peace. Of course, this day has been ignored by the U.S. government and mainstream media, but for followers of the nonviolent Jesus, such a day gets at the heart of the spiritual life. For us, every day is World Peace Day.

We keep in mind that when Jesus rose from the dead, his first words to his community were "Peace be with you." We welcome that first gift of resurrection and stake our lives on it. Because we follow the peacemaking Jesus, we try to live in peace with everyone, with all of creation, with the God of peace.

So on Sept. 21, World Peace Day, we join with people around the globe who long for a new world of peace. We reclaim our special calling to be instruments of Christ's peace, ambassadors of reconciliation, blessed peacemakers in a world of war. Never was it so important to take this calling seriously.

That means, we try to make peace with ourselves. To make peace with our spouses, children and relatives. To make peace with our neighbors. To make peace with everyone in the church. To make peace with all creatures and all of creation. To make peace with our enemies, even to love them, as Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount.

Some say it's just too hard to be peaceful, to make peace, but I think this is the beginning of the spiritual life. That's how the journey starts. Peacemaking is hard. That's why we have our wonderful sacraments, our Gospel, our saints, our community, one another -- to help each other become more and more prayerful, more and more nonviolent, more and more the disarming presence of the peacemaking Christ in our world.

It's because we so quickly give up the work of peace that today we have some 35 wars being waged, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons, billions of people suffering in poverty, 900 million people starving to death and global warming threatening us all.

It's because we give in to despair and apathy that the U.S. war on Iraq and Afghanistan goes on. This week, a new study reports that more than 1.2 million Iraqis have been killed by the United States military since March 2003 (See: <http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/iraq/iraqdeaths.html>). A few weeks ago, we blew up dozens of children in Afghanistan. The killings go on, while the media debates "lipstick on a pig."

World Peace Day reminds us that peace is the center of our prayer, our hearts, our relationships, our work, our lives. It urges us to do something new for peace -- no matter how small or insignificant it may seem in the grand scheme of things.

The saints show us that every one of us can make a difference. We can harbor the peace of Christ in our hearts. We can be a healing presence to our families and neighbors. We can support the grassroots movements for peace and justice, such as Pax Christi USA and the Catholic Worker. We can point the way forward from conflict, division, violence and war to God's reign of peace and nonviolence. We can continue to call for an end to the U.S. wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan; for an end to executions and nuclear weapons; for an end to corporate greed and big oil and all the policies that favor the super rich and crush the world's poor.

"Peace I leave you, my peace I give you," Jesus told his friends the night before he was killed. This World Peace Day, as we join the global call for a new world of peace, we once again accept Jesus' gift of peace and carry on his nonviolent resistance to war and empire through his way, truth and life of nonviolent love. As we do, we sow the seeds of hope for a disarmed world.

John Dear's autobiography, "A Persistent Peace" (Loyola Press) is now available at www.amazon.com [1]. Next week, he will embark on a 10-week national book tour across the country to speak about peace, nonviolence and Jesus. For details, see: www.fatherjohndear.org [2].

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