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My last homily in New Mexico

John Dear S.J. | May. 24, 2011 On the Road to Peace

Turns out, over the past nine years while I?ve lived and worked in New Mexico church authorities have received hundreds of letters of complaint about me and my stand for peace from Catholics who support war and build nuclear weapons, primarily from the Catholics who work at the Los Alamos National Laboratories.

Their campaign has worked.

Long story short, my Jesuit provincial has ordered me to leave New Mexico and move to a Jesuit house in Baltimore, Maryland. Once again, I am dealing with the life-disrupting consequences of speaking for peace in a culture of war. I am very sad to leave this beautiful land, but I?m preparing to return to the East coast.

With that in mind, I thought I would share the homily I gave this past weekend for my last mass at San Jose de Pichacho, the little mission church where I have been helping out on the Mexican border in the Diocese of Las Cruces, under the guidance of good Bishop Ricardo Ramirez. It refers to Sunday?s Gospel from John 14: 1-12.

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Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God; have faith also in me... I am the way and the truth and the life.

What beautiful, encouraging words! I?ve been wondering what is the best thing I could say to you for my last weekend here with you, and I?ve decided that the best thing I can say is simply to encourage you to live the rest of your lives with Jesus.

I invite you more than ever to have faith in Jesus; to trust in Jesus; to make Jesus your way, your truth, and your life; to renew your commitment to Jesus; and to see your life journey, the rest of your life, as a journey with Jesus, your savior and friend.

Like you, this is basically what I?ve been trying to do with my life. When I was a wild college kid at Duke, I was trying to run away from God. Then one day, I came to my senses, realized that life is short, that God is a good God of love and peace, that Jesus has the only answers which ring true, and so I decided to try to give my life to Jesus, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1982.

My journey has taken me around the world, to many countries and places, to meet many people, to serve in a wide variety of ways, but I hope it?s basically been a peacemaking journey with Jesus.

Along the way, I?ve learned that all we have to do is follow Jesus, to ?make our story fit into the story of Jesus,? to make our life journeys fit into the life journey of Jesus.

So in light of our Gospel, I invite you to reflect this week: How has your life journey been a life journey with

Jesus. How have you walked with Jesus through your life? How have you had faith in Jesus and trusted in Jesus? How have you made Jesus the way, the truth and the life, the center of your life?

What more can you do to live through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus? How can we walk with Jesus more and more every day for the rest of our lives? How can we trust in him more and more?

I want to share a few friendly points about trying to do that.

First, prayer. There are many types of prayer but I urge you to try to take some quiet time every day in prayer with Jesus. According to St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, a good way to do that is simply to take 15 to 30 minutes and sit in silence, perhaps in the morning before you start your day, and just imagine you are sitting with Jesus.

This is what I do every morning. Be with Jesus, talk to Jesus, and listen to Jesus. What does he look like, what does he say to you, how does it feel to be in his presence?

I think Jesus wants to say to each one of you: ?I love you very much, I am with you, I want to be with you, you are mine. Follow me, trust me, live in my peace and love everyone I bring into your life.?

Prayer is how we live in intimate relationship with Jesus and I encourage you to develop your relationship with Jesus.

Second, read the Gospel. I urge you to try to read a little of the four Gospels -- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John -- every day. Don?t let the newspapers and TV determine your life. Try to read a little bit each day from the Gospels so you are always listening to Jesus, thinking about him, and letting him determine your day to day life, and the direction of your life.

Third, keep on participating in the sacraments, as you do. Be people of the Eucharist. Let Jesus be your food and drink. Let the sacraments transform you, heal you, and be guideposts for your journey through life.

Fourth, from your prayer, your Gospel reading, and the sacraments, continue to cultivate and practice unconditional, nonviolent, universal love. Let God love you, and then love yourself. Accept yourself as loved by God, loved by Jesus. And then, since you are infinitely loved by God and by Jesus, love everyone around you.

Love your spouses, love your parents, love your children, love your neighbors, love everyone you meet, and try to widen your hearts to love everyone on the planet -- even, Jesus says, to love your enemies, which for us means the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Libya. We?re trying to let Jesus be the way, the truth and the life for us, which means, we are invited to be, like him, people of universal love, boundless compassion, and infinite peace.

Fifth, service. This kind of ?Jesus love? means we are people who serve. We don?t want people to serve us; we seek to serve others, especially those in need, and we know that those in need are Jesus. Jesus is in the hungry, homeless, immigrant, marginalized, sick and imprisoned. Spend your life serving him there. Try to serve others every day from now on.

Finally, he says in the Sermon on the Mount, ?Seek first the kin-dom of God and everything you need will be given to you.?

So set your sights high. Pursue the high ground. Raise the bar. Seek God?s kin-dom, God?s justice, and God?s peace. Do what you can to make the world a better, more peaceful, more just place. Work for the abolition of

war, poverty, injustice and violence, and welcome his life of love, justice and peace for all.

Gandhi put it this way: ?Be the change you wish to see in the world.?

I would add: ?Be the love you wish others would show. Offer the compassion and forgiveness you wish others would offer. Speak the truth you wish someone else would speak. Live life and promote life even as others are stuck in the culture of death. Practice nonviolence even though you are surrounded by violence. Be the peace you want for the whole world.?

By doing this, we become true disciples of Jesus. Then, he really is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

That is the best thing we can do with our lives. No matter what is happening to us, we are going to try to live in loving relationship with Jesus, to walk with Jesus through life, and to trust Jesus.

Through prayer, Gospel reading, the sacraments, love, service and seeking God?s kin-dom, we place our faith, hope and trust in Jesus and carry on his good works of love and peace.

My hope and prayer is that as we make the nonviolent Jesus more and more the center of our lives, that our hearts will not be troubled and we will always live in his love and peace. Amen.

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Please join John Dear at the upcoming Wildgoose Festival, June 23-26, in Durham, NC, the first annual U.S. ecumenical Christian justice and arts festival. Richard Rohr, Jim Wallis, Shane Claiborne, Joyce Hollyday, Vincent Harding and many others will also speak. See: www.wildgoosefestival.org [1]. John's latest book, *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Orbis), and other recent books, *A Persistent Peace* and *Put Down Your Sword*, as well as Patricia Normile's *John Dear On Peace*, are available from www.amazon.com [2]. John's teachings on Gospel nonviolence are featured in the DVD film *The Narrow Path*, available at www.sandamianofoundation.org [3]. To contribute to Catholic Relief Services' "Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund," go to: http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn [4]. For further information, or to schedule a lecture or retreat, visit: www.johndear.org [5].

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