

Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace

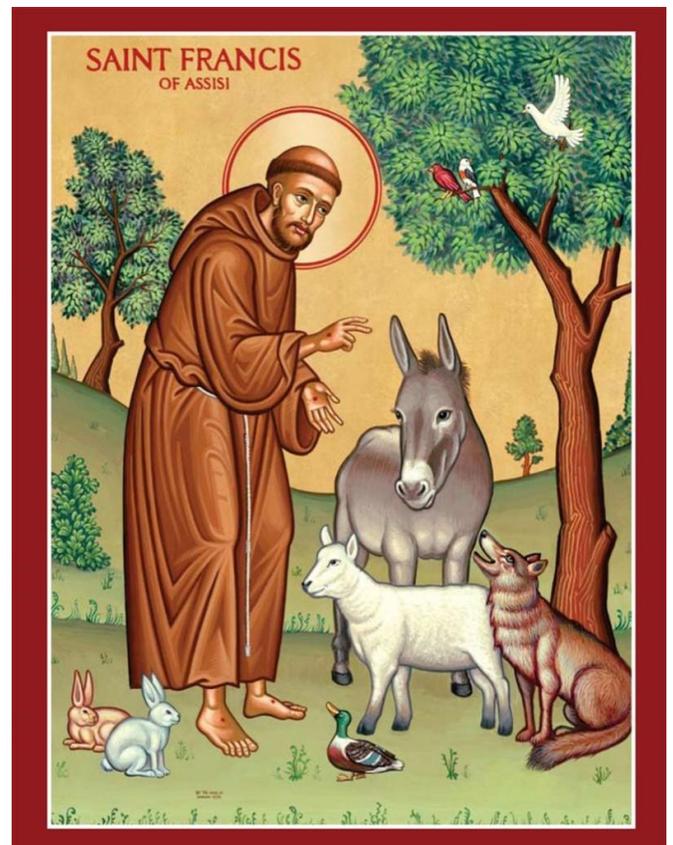
St. Francis of Assisi was a remarkable person of his time (1181-1226), and he still is widely admired. He gave up everything, and I do mean everything, that he owned or had any hope of inheriting from his father to follow God's call to rebuild God's Church. Francis lived in poverty rather than allow material possessions to cloud his awareness of what God had called him to do. His name lives on in the order of priests that he founded: the Franciscans.

If he had done nothing more than create what we have come to know as the "Prayer of St. Francis," I would thank God for this remarkable follower of Jesus Christ. I have included his prayer at the end of this blog for each of us to read and to explore how it could help us. I think of it as one way to prepare myself to accept what God wants from me now. If we want to know how healthy our souls are, a question that I discuss regularly, we each first need to examine our own soul. This prayer can help us to do so by causing us to answer the question, "How close am I to being who God wants me to be and to doing what God wants me to do in each of these areas of my spiritual life?"

What I notice about myself is that using this prayer slows me down, and that is not a bad thing. If I try to rush the prayer I begin to feel frustrated. I am in awe of the first petition in this prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." Do I really want to be someone whose life is focused on bringing God's peace into even my little sphere of influence? It's risky being committed to working for peace. After all, if we work for peace we might upset some people whose income depends on having various weapon systems in place, with people trained to use them, either to prevent or actually fight wars. They are increasingly costly, and they consume enormous amounts of money every year. They are built for the Pentagon by big companies to enable our military to kill whoever the "enemy" is.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." If we ask God to help us to be instruments of God's peace, how do we respond to those who remind us that peace is not something that we can just wish for. It takes work on all sides in a conflict to create and sustain real peace. Anyone who watches the PBS news or follows the news with any of the other reliable media outlets cannot avoid noticing that the Middle East, as just one example, is a bubbling pot of old, unhealed wounds constantly being irritated. The battles may have happened a few years ago, or they may go back literally 500 years. The survivors and their progeny remember as them if they happened yesterday.

Sadly, there are so many violent "yesterdays" that are neither forgiven nor forgotten, that the people who live in such areas are in almost constant danger of enduring and even repeating or the battles waged by their ancestors. Without openness to God's grace it is not possible to forgive. As a result, there will be no real peace--just an ongoing desire for revenge and political mastery. Those who live to fight another day--will!!



One of my former parishioners, a man with very strong emotions that he frequently unleashed on his staff, sat in on a youth group meeting that I was leading. (I will call him Sean to protect his privacy.) We were discussing some of the obstacles that interfere with lasting peace. It didn't take long before Sean very forcefully confronted me with his perception of how war worked. He said, "Larry, I want you to know that it only takes one (person, nation, rogue group) to start a war. It takes two to stop it." I don't remember what I said. I wish that I had thought to say, "Sean, I agree with you wholeheartedly. So what can we do to make certain, at least as a starting point, that **we** are not the ones to start a war?" "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." Do we have any idea of what other problems that we may encounter by working for peace? Let's start with the force we know as the NRA--the National Rifle Association. (Full Disclosure: It is a remote possibility that I am a distant cousin of the NRA's executive vice-president: Wayne LaPierre, but we have never met nor communicated with each other.) If I understand their position correctly, they are basically opposed to any limitations on the right to own guns. Like the social liberal that I am, I can live with someone owning rifles or shotguns for hunting, but assault rifles and huge clips of ammunitions--really?

"Lord, Make me an instrument of your peace." Are there other problems that we might encounter if we pray for grace to literally allow God to work through us to create and sustain peace? Yes, there are. In fact, one that we may find difficult to cope with is our own lack of inner peace. If we are living in a state of more or less constant anxiety we are probably consuming a lot of energy worrying about how to master whatever is making us anxious.

One of our active United Methodist bishops, Bishop Devadhar (serving the New England Episcopal Area) wrote a pastoral letter this week about the prevalence of anxiety today. Noting that he was taking some time off to visit his family, he shared that he had noticed the effects of anxiety on his oldest granddaughter. This seven-year-old child was actually anxious about the effects of climate change. That is remarkable, almost precocious, and also sad. No child should have to suffer anxiety over such a huge problem.

At seven years of age she needs people who will reassure her that many adults are working to solve this and so many other problems that prevent her from living in a world where peace is the norm. She, like all of our grandchildren as well as all of God's people, need to live in peace. We are each needed to do what we can to disarm and otherwise oppose organizations and other forces that continue to upset the peace of God's world and God's people.

Let's decide to proactively work for peace. With God's grace we can be instruments of God's peace if we are at peace ourselves. Are we?

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

