

First Week of Advent (November 30 – December 6)

In this first week of Advent, we are encouraged to explore the experience of peace within ourselves. This look at intrapersonal peacemaking is an opportunity to allow the *Peace Made Flesh* to further transform our own life.



Opening Prayer for each day of Week 1:

Peace 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;
And 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

Closing Prayer for Week 1:

Blessing (Given to Brother Leo at La Verna)

May the Lord bless you
and keep you;
may the Lord show his face to you
and have compassion on you!
May he turn his face to you
and give you peace!

Amen.

Personal Peacefulness Practice Items for Each Day of Week 1:



- Notice any negative attitudes you have toward yourself and choose a positive affirmation to say to yourself whenever the negative attitude surfaces.
- Feelings/sensations in your body. Notice any fear/anger you feel in your body and take some deep breaths and imagine yourself breathing out this negative emotion and breathing in the peace of Christ.
- Try to eat well, sleep enough, and/or exercise this week and notice if you feel more peaceful.
- Try fasting one day each week with the intention of being more peaceful on your fasting day. Fasting creates emptiness in a physical sense, but it also creates an opportunity for peacemaking. In this emptiness, we can connect in solidarity with those in need, as well as be more open to being “filled” with insight on how to be active Gospel Peacemakers.
- If your health allows, lower your thermostat two degrees from where you normally set it to further connect yourself to the larger created reality.

Sunday, November 30 (First Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading (for Sunday and Monday of Advent Week 1)

A reading from the Gospel of Mark:

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’” (Mk 13: 33-37)



Sunday Reflection Question: Have you ever watched and waited for someone in your life to come or return? What did you learn?

Monday, December 1

Reading: Re-read the Sunday Scripture Passage.

Monday Reflection Question: What does it feel like to watch and wait for the Prince of Peace in your life? How do you expect or anticipate receiving this peace?

Tuesday, December 2

Reading: *St. Francis’s Conversion: From Violence to Wholeness*
(For Tuesday and Wednesday of Week 1 of Advent)

Once there was a great massacre in a war between the citizens of Perugia and Assisi. Francis was captured along with many others, and chained with the rest of them, endured the squalor of prison.ⁱ

[After a long recuperation from his imprisonment, Francis tried again to be a heroic warrior and to join a crusade.]

When [Francis] set out for Apulia, he got as far as Spoleto, where he began to feel a little ill. No less anxious about the trip, as he was falling asleep, half awake, he heard someone asking him where he

wanted to go. When Francis revealed to him his entire plan, the other said: “Who can do more good for you, the Lord or the servant?” When [Francis] answered him: “The Lord,” he said to him: “Then why are you abandoning the Lord for the servant, the patron for the client?” And Francis said: “Lord what do you want me to do?” “Go back to your land,” he said, “and what you are to do will be told to you. You must understand in another way the vision which you saw.”ⁱⁱ

Francis of Assisi: Early Documents

Reflection Reading with the Story from the Life of St. Francis

Nonviolence often arises in the context of violence. In his book, *Francis of Assisi*, Arnaldo Fortini illustrates the barbarity of the era in which Francis lived. He quotes warriors of that time: “It is good to see war tents spread out in the meadows, to hear the cry of an attack, to look at the dead lying in trenches, pierced by the stumps of bannered lances.”ⁱⁱⁱ No torture seemed too great as the perpetrators and bystanders gloried in the blood and gore. They rejoiced in battle and body count, which Fortini insists they saw as giving joy to life. It also gave power and riches.

At the time of Francis, civil war existed in Assisi between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots. These were wars fought for power and economic gain. The new merchants fought the nobility. A very bloody war between Assisi and Perugia broke out in 1202. A 20-year-old Francis marched off in a spirit of exhilaration and glory. But the Assisians were overrun and beaten. Fortini writes that the “sight of those killed on the field where the fighting took place was horrifying beyond words...all



[the fields] were covered with the dead. ‘How disfigured are the bodies on the field of battle, and how mutilated and broken the members.’ ...Assisi was appalled by the massacre... A great

many of Assisi were taken prisoner.... Among them was Francis.... That battle with all its raw ferocity and bloodthirsty pride, the sight of the dead, and the infinite grief made in Francis’s warm and generous spirit a wound so deep that time never healed it. ...Anyone who lives through the soul-searing instant of madness when meeting an enemy knows the nightmare that comes later.”^{iv}

After the battle of Collestrada, Francis was taken to Perugia and imprisoned. He was one of the fortunate ones. The archers and infantrymen were butchered, but the knights and those riding horses were held for ransom. Francis’s prison was miserable, crowded and brutal. Francis made efforts to overcome the brutality and lift the spirits of his fellow-prisoners. Nevertheless, he succumbed to severe illness. This

ultimately enabled his father to ransom him. Francis had to suffer through a long convalescence, attended to by his loving mother. He did recover his health. But Celano notes: “From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable.”^v

Francis had not completely lost the hunger for battle and the longing for glory that was so much a part of his culture. Once again he set out to join a great knight, Walter of Brienne, in a campaign with the papal militia. He was even enticed into this crusade by a dream of his house filled with arms, shields and other implements of war. He saw this as a sign of success as he set out for Apulia and battle and glory. But a voice spoke to him and asked, “Who can do more good for you, the Lord or the servant?” and then urged him to go back to his own land where he would be told what to do. Francis returned to Assisi, resumed some of his prodigal ways, but then encountered a leper, whom he kissed, and heard a voice from the cross calling him to rebuild the church.

Thus a very radical transformation began. Francis’s eagerness to provide for the poor, and his desire to be in the company of lepers and the outcast move him to an entirely different class in life. This was most dramatically illustrated when he went before the Bishop Guido and offered all his means, and even all his clothes, to his father.

Francis took the words of the cross seriously and began to literally repair churches; he also joined in a very caring way with the poor and the lepers. Francis had made a dramatic social change. He had alienated himself from his family and his social grouping. In our contemporary usage, Francis had made a radical, preferential option for the poor.

Francis and Nonviolence

The focus in this volume is not just on Francis’s conversion from a life of pleasure, frivolity and excess to a devout follower of Christ. We are especially interested in the way that Francis follows, in particular, the *nonviolence* of Christ.

Nonviolence emerges, as noted above, in the midst of violence. The more dramatic the violence, the stronger the temptation to respond in turn with violence. But horrific violence also stimulates the opposite in some people. Some people, rather than desiring to retaliate, seek instead an alternative. They are motivated to experiment with active nonviolence. How might this have been true in the life of St. Francis?

Fortini describes the horrors of war and the impact this warfare had on Francis. Francis likely shed blood in the Perugia campaign. In the wake of this war and its brutality, Francis conceivably suffered from what today is described as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This term, though popularized during the Vietnam War, applies to veterans of all wars and to survivors of other very traumatic events. While sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder sometimes seek out new forms of violence and conflict, in many cases they seek to avoid conflict. They also demonstrate diminished interest or participation in activities they previously enjoyed; often they feel detached from others and withdraw from the external world, frequently experiencing recurring nightmares, sleeplessness, depression, hopelessness, irritation and anger. Francis experienced the trauma of war and bore many of the marks of a survivor of war. Dealing with anger was a continual challenge. In his later years, he suffered from depression. He experienced sleeplessness, nightmares and dramatic dreams; he even lost interest in things he had previously enjoyed, including spending time in nature.

Common to many people who endure war or imprisonment is “survivor’s guilt.” It is not improbable that Francis’s exceptional concern for the poor was rooted, in part, in an abiding awareness that the poor Assisians who fought with him in the war against Perugia had been slaughtered while he, the son of a rich merchant, had instead been held for ransom. An acute consciousness of this burden—the burden of being given back his life while others had not—may have played a role in his abandoning the privilege that had spared his life. This awareness may have provoked a dramatic reversal of his desire for riches which yielded its opposite: the longing to marry Lady Poverty and to live the fate of the poor himself. All of these are the qualities that made Francis a saint, a sanctity that may have been spawned in a conscious struggle with the brutality of war and its cloying aftermath.

Many who suffer from post-traumatic stress continue a life of violence under many guises. Some end their lives in prison or meet a violent death. Some recover, some do not. The severity of the trauma is often a predictor. For Francis the conditions were, as Fortini suggests, extremely severe. But Francis had the unique grace to turn these disorders into a path toward holiness.

One of the most important ways to treat great stress is meditation. Francis entered caves in the hills and drew very close to God. He re-engaged with nature. He gave himself in service to others, often a remarkably curative activity. He sought to re-write the “script,” as when he went before the Sultan with only a cross. He overcame his fear of robbers and wolves. He treated all—especially those with leprosy—with deep respect, cherishing each one as bearing the face of Christ. In these and many other ways he overcame the violence within himself and healed the trauma. His close relationships with the Brothers and with Clare brought him into a new and profound sense of community. These are traits of the way of nonviolence, including the principles of nonviolence enumerated in this study. They call for a deep transformation of heart as we seek to live out what Martin Luther King, Jr. refers to as the “Beloved Community.” Francis’s deep appreciation of every person led him to see no one as enemy. He preferred to welcome enemies into his midst.

Although Francis started out as a combatant, he became a conscientious objector. He withdrew from his commitment to the Crusade of Walter of Brienne and embodied a commitment of disarmament by carrying a cross, not a sword, when approaching the Sultan.

Moreover, he encouraged others not to take up the sword. As Former Minister General of the Friars Minor, Herman Schaluck noted, “He forbade all of his followers to carry weapons. As a result, it became difficult for some feudal lords to muster an army together, as there were so many Secular Franciscans who refused to carry arms. This simple demand by Francis helped to collapse the feudal system in Europe.”^{vi} As Brother Herman writes, Francis is an apt model in our own day, for he once saw war as a road to glory, but eventually came to see its human devastation. Such awareness is especially acutely needed today with carpet bombing, smart bombs, terrorism, and embargoes that strangle the lives of children. As Schaluck suggests, there are indications that Francis helped bring about the abolition of war in certain parts of Europe during some periods of the Middle Ages.

Ultimately, we are speaking of a deep religious conversion. Francis transcended the extreme violence of his times—with which he himself was originally fascinated and in which he eagerly participated—and was touched and transformed by the compassion of God. He recognized, perhaps while in

battle or in prison, that there is a woundedness *and* a sacredness in every person and in all of creation.

This is the starting point of nonviolence. The transforming power of nonviolence begins and ends with an awareness of the presence of God. It is this presence that breaks the spiral of violence. The Spirit of our unifying God is present when conflict is resolved, when the script of violence is rewritten to embrace the sacredness of all parties and when creativity is used to break the cycle of retaliation. Moving from his woundedness, through his dramatic illness, Francis achieves a deep conversion that overcame the dominant drive for violence. He came to see that an all-loving God is a God of compassion. Human beings are meant to love and be loved, radically and totally. This dynamic challenges us to overcome the divisions that separate us and to discover the underlying sacredness that unites us.

Francis comes, finally, to understand his true vocation, the calling to love one another as God has loved us. In practical terms this means resisting the tendency of violence to divide the world into various enemy camps. Practitioners of nonviolence seek to become their truest selves by slowly learning to love all beings, especially their enemies. In verse 38 of his *Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance* Francis exhorts us “We must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.”^{vii}

In verse 23 of his *Testament*, Francis tells us that “The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: ‘May the Lord give you peace.’”^{viii} Bonaventure recalls, “At the beginning and end of every sermon he announced peace; in every greeting he wished for peace.”^{ix} Francis instructs his brothers, as they enter someone’s house, to say “Peace to this house.”

Historian and theologian Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M. asks the question: “Why does Francis use these greetings which, historically speaking, were unusual and uncommon at that time?” Chinnici suggests that these greetings of peace comprise a social act. They are a call to overcome the dominant violence of the times and the system of dominance that fosters and promotes violence. To seek such peace is a communal action; it is active nonviolence. It addresses the structure of violence, as well as the political and economic systems that separate peoples into warring parties. Chinnici asserts that the central thrust of Francis’s life pursuit was to overcome violence with a new call for peace.

Chinnici suggests Francis’s underlying Christology: addressing and seeking to transform violence leads us to be more like Christ. Francis, through his own experience of violence, identified with the one who overcame violence. Francis identified with the one who told Peter to put down the sword and who healed the servant’s ear. Francis identified with the one who, on the cross, prayed, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Francis’s stigmata was an identification with this nonviolent Christ from deep within, a sign of his full conversion from a man of war to a man of peace.

The greeting of Christ after his resurrection was “Peace be with you.” Francis bore that message to the world of his time. Chinnici notes that Francis sums up his life project of professing peace with the *Canticle of All Creation*, which Chinnici calls “A Cosmic Hymn of Peace.” All creatures are identified as brothers and sisters. All participate in God, who created everything. So it is inevitable to practice peace. This remains a challenge for our times. To do this, Chinnici suggests, we “need armies of brothers and sisters who manifest peace.”



Tuesday Reflection Question: In what ways does the story and reflection of Francis' conversion speak to your own personal and on-going conversion?

Wednesday, December 3

Reading: Reflect again on the Tuesday Reading on Francis' conversion

Wednesday Reflection Question: What experiences in your own life are examples of the challenges and possibilities of conversion to a life of Gospel Peacemaking?

Thursday, December 4

Reading for Thursday and Friday of Week 1 of Advent:

Saint Francis Meets a Leper on the Road: A powerful retelling of the beloved saint's conversion experience.

BY: Valerie Martin

Valerie Martin, the author of "Mary Reilly," decided to retell St. Francis of Assisi's life after she spent three years in Italy. In this scene, Francis--a wealthy and popular young man ready to return to his round of parties--has just come back from Rome. Excerpted from [Salvation: Scenes from the Life of St. Francis](#) with permission.



The leper stands in the middle of the road, perfectly still. One hand rests on the bell cord around his neck, the other hangs limply at his side. He is dressed in a filthy garment, patched together from bits of sacking and undyed wool, which hangs loosely upon his emaciated body. He regards Francesco and the horse steadily, his head slightly turned and his chin lifted, the better to see them, for his disease has eaten away half his of face and he has only one eye.

Francesco does not speak, he cannot move. They face each

other on the road, and the sun pours down over them, so that there are no shadows anywhere, nothing to soften or dim the reality of this encounter and nowhere to hide from the necessity of playing it out. The leper's eye drills into Francesco; he can feel it penetrating into his brain. From childhood he has had a horror of lepers, and he has always avoided the lazaretto at the foot of Mount Subasio, where they sometimes congregate in the road, ringing their bells and calling out for alms. The stench rising from their rotting flesh, their phlegmy, guttural voices, pursue him in dreams, from which he wakes sweating and shouting for help.

But this is no dream, and there is no point in shouting now, for no one will hear. He glances back down the road and into the neat ranks of olive trees. The world is uncommonly still.

He could ride on. There is no reason to stop. As he passes, he can throw down his last coin to the leper. His horse lifts one hoof and paws the dirt. It is time to go on, to go home. As Francesco drops his hand to the reins, his eyes fall upon his own expensive, well-fitting glove, and it dawns on him that this leper is not wearing gloves, which is odd; he and his kind are required to wear them when they leave their hospitals, just as they are required to wear and ring their bells to warn the unwary traveler of their approach. Again Francesco looks down upon the solitary figure of the leper, who has not moved a muscle. His hand is still wrapped around the cord of the bell, his head arrested at an

angle. He is like a weather-beaten statue, and Francesco has the sense that he has been standing there, in his path, forever.

Something has been coming toward him, or he has been coming to something; he has known this for some time, and he has bent his energy in the direction of finding out what it might be. This was the reason for his pilgrimage to Roma. At the shrines he recited the requisite prayers, gazed upon relics, bones, bits of hair and cloth, vials of blood and tears, proffered the proper offerings, but he did not feel the burden of his sins lifted, and this spiritual restlessness drove him on. Only when he was with the beggars beneath the portico at the basilica did he feel some respite from this condition of urgent expectancy.

He is in the grip of it again as he swings one leg over the saddle and drops to the ground beside his horse. The stillness of the world makes every sound acute: the clicking of the bridle chain as he leads the animal to a green patch nearby, the sound of grass tearing, and then the big jaws grinding as the horse chews the first clump. Francesco runs his hands through his hair, bats the dust from the front of his surcoat, and turns to face the man, who is there, waiting for him.

The leper watches him with interest. His blasted face is bathed in sunlight; the black hole that was his eye has a steely sheen, and a few moist drops on his lips glitter like precious stones. He moves at last, releasing his bell cord and extending his hand slowly, palm up, before him.

This supplicating gesture releases Francesco, for it dictates the counter gesture, which he realizes he longs to make. Without hesitation, he strides across the distance separating him from his obligation, smiling all the while as if stepping out to greet an old and dear friend. He opens his purse, extracts the thin piece of silver inside it, and closes it up again. He is closer now than he has ever been to one of those unfortunate beings, and the old familiar reaction of disgust and nausea rises up, nearly choking him, but he battles it down. He can hear the rasp of the leper's diseased, difficult breath, rattling and wet. The war between Francesco's will and his reluctance overmasters him; he misses a step, recovers, then drops to one knee before the

outstretched hand, which is hardly recognizable as a hand but is rather a lumpish, misshapen thing, the fingers so swollen and calloused that they are hardly differentiated, the flesh as hard as an animal's rough paw. Carefully, Francesco places his coin in the open palm, where it glitters, hot and white.

For a moment he tries to form some simple speech, some pleasantry that will restore him to the ordinary world, but even as he struggles, he understands that this world is gone from him now, that there is no turning back; it was only so much smoke, blinding and confusing him, but he has come through it somehow, he has found the source of it, and now, at last, he is standing in the fire. Tenderly he takes the leper's hand, tenderly he brings it to his lips. At once his mouth is flooded with an unearthly sweetness, which pours over his tongue, sweet and hot, burning his throat and bringing sudden tears to his eyes. These tears moisten the corrupted hand he presses to his mouth. His ears are filled with the sound of wind, and he can feel the wind chilling his face, a cold, harsh wind blowing toward him from the future, blowing away everything that has come before this moment, which he has longed for and dreaded, as if he thought he might not live through it. He reaches up, clinging to the leper's tunic, for the wind is so strong, so cold, he fears he cannot stand against it. Behind him, the horse lifts his head from his grazing and lets out a long, impatient whinny, but Francesco does not hear him. He is there in the road, rising to his feet, and the leper assists him, holding him by the shoulders. Then the two men clutch each other, their faces pressed close together, their arms entwined. The sun beats down, the air is hot and still, yet they appear to be caught in a whirlwind. Their clothes whip about, their hair stands on end; they hold on to each other for dear life.



Thursday Reflection Question: Have you ever met anyone who has had a powerful impact (to the point of conversion) on your spiritual journey?

Friday, December 5

Reading: Reflect again on the reading from Thursday, December 4th.

Friday Reflection Question: Have you ever had direct contact with someone who was poor and/or marginalized? If so, what was that experience like? If not, imagine what that would be like.

Saturday, December 6

Reading: None

Reflection Question(s): Reflect on the week as a whole -- prayers, readings, reflections, and actions. As you integrate this week, what insights do you have?

Are there ways that you understand how to live in a more peaceful manner in your own intrapersonal life after this week of prayer, reflection and personal peacemaking?

ⁱ Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. II, The Founder* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), p. 69. Verse 4 of the Legend of the Three Companions.

ⁱⁱ Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. II, The Founder* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), p. 71. Verse 6 of the Legend of the Three Companions.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi* translated by Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1981) p. 140.

^{iv} Fortini, pp. 154-155.

^v Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I, The Saint* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), p. 184. 1 Celano, verse 4.

^{vi} Herman Schaluck, O.F.M., *The Anthonian*, St. Anthony's Guild: New York, 1995, pp. 22-23.

^{vii} Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I, The Saint* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), p. 48.

^{viii} Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I, The Saint* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), p. 126, verse 23.

^{ix} Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, translated by Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., edited with introduction by Stephen F. Brown (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 1.