

THAW

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OUR HOST: THE HIGHLAND SHEPHERD

A unique, Christian site, featuring many resources for individuals and for parish study and action. Not without humour! A creation of Canon Jim Irvine, of the Diocese of Fredericton. Cruise the site; it's useful, edifying, fun, original, surprising!

In This issue

We hope you have had a peaceful Christmas. About peace: we hear from the Patriarch of Jerusalem about peace in Bethlehem. We have a remarkably open Reflection on becoming a peacemaker, by Ty Ragan. We have a small poem by me on the Manger. We have not heard from Archdemon Weir Shivering, who is stranded on a large ice flow which has broken off Ellsmere Island and is floating freely in the Arctic Ocean. He will soon be out of his archdemonry. Here, in the Winnipeg region, we awoke to 8 inches of snow; enough to cancel services on this last Sunday of the year. The plows will be out shortly. I wish you a happy new year.

GOD'S LITTLE PLACE

Jesus Lord and babe, world shaker
Muckle meek, barn-born, our Maker,
God among us, heaven's loss

and Mary, our Theotokos.

Infinite ,Your tiny form;
Midst lowing animals you're born'
God is fit for humble birth
by worldly measure, nothing worth

Keep us on the lowly way
simplicity in all we say
so we may enter Jesus' place
and, kneeling, see God face to face.

Posted with "Harold Macdonald's Muse" at

<http://msgr.ca/msgr-7/Harold%20Macdonald%20Muse%20-%20Gods%20little%20place.htm>

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Brothers and Sisters here in Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Cyprus, I wish each and every one of you joy, serenity, tranquility and peace. This year again, Christmas is coming to Bethlehem amid the same circumstances of death and frustration, with the Wall and the checkpoints on the ground and in the hearts. The occupation and deprivation of freedom on one side, and fear and insecurity on the other, continue as before. Gaza remains a big prison, a place of death and of internal Palestinian dissension. Even children have been killed. And everyone, including the international community, remains powerless to find the right road to peace and justice. Fear of the future has engulfed the entire region: Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan. For everyone, the future is at stake. In this context, world terrorism is feeding on all of the open wounds.

That is the way Christmas is seen today from Bethlehem. And yet, the Christmas message is meant to be one of life, peace, and justice. The prophet Jeremiah said: "In those days, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land [] and Jerusalem shall dwell in security" (Jer 33, 15-16). And Isaiah extended his vision to include all nations: "So will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations" (Is 61, 11). Saint Paul, for his part, in the second readings of the Advent Season, tells us that we enter into the ways of justice and peace through love of neighbor and through holiness: "May the Lord increase you and make you overflow with love for one another and for all [] and may he strengthen your hearts, making them blameless and holy before God" (1 Thes 3, 11).

Moreover, since the First Sunday of Advent, the Church has put before our eyes the person of John the Baptist, the Precursor of Christ. He preached repentance, and various categories of people came to listen to him and asked him questions about the ways of repentance and new life. Even soldiers asked him what they should do to save themselves: "Soldiers also asked him: 'Teacher, what is it that we should do?' He told them, 'Do not oppress anyone, do not extort anything, and be satisfied with your wages'" (Lk 3, 14).

Today, life in Bethlehem and its surrounding area has become very difficult to endure, in spite of the numerous initiatives of solidarity that have come from the outside. Yes, we are in need of solidarity, and we are grateful for all the messages of brotherhood we have received from around the world. But our fundamental need is for peace, justice, freedom, and an end to the occupation. Faced with this, the world seems powerless. However, we say: each and every person, even soldiers and political leaders, have the capacity to appreciate love, salvation, and life. But for that to happen, a conversion must take place, a conversion from death to life, from viewing the other as an enemy and a murderer to viewing him as a brother and a giver of life.

Our political leaders also must ask the Baptist: "And what is it that we should do to find salvation for ourselves and for all those who have put their destiny into our hands?" They too must be prepared to receive the same answer: "Do not oppress anyone, do not extort anything, and be satisfied with your wages" (Lk 3, 14).

They must listen to the voice of the oppressed in this Holy Land, to the voice of those who have died, of those who are still threatened by death and humiliation, those on whom they think they can impose death or humiliation in order to assure the security of the other party.

Bethlehem is meant to be the city of peace. Unfortunately, it is now just the contrary, a city of conflict and death. Life and peace, however, would be easy and possible to come by if only those in positions of responsibility were sincerely determined to pursue them. Salvation will come from bringing the two peoples together, not from separating them. In that lies the salvation of the Palestinians and the Israelis, as well as of the entire region. The two peoples are capable of living together in peace and tranquility. When that comes about, murders, vengeance, rejection, and extremism will disappear little by little, as they progressively cease to feed on oppression, occupation, poverty, and humiliation.

Christmas brings joy to humanity. It announces salvation to everyone, especially to those who live in Bethlehem and its surrounding area, Palestinians and Israelis alike. "Let us go to Bethlehem" and see what has taken place and what continues to take place there (cf. Lk 2, 15). What is the Wall telling us today? What are the inhabitants of Bethlehem telling us today? Let us go to Bethlehem so that we too can hear the angels announce peace on earth, peace to all people of good will,

peace to all who long for a sincere brotherhood that rejects all hatred and hostility, and find, in the coming together of the two peoples, both security and an end to the occupation which will bring freedom.

For all of you, Brothers and Sisters, I pray to God that you might hear and live the message of Christmas, a message of peace, joy, and new life.

+ Michel Sabbah, Patriarch
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, 20 December 2006

LORD MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE

By Ty Ragan n/TSSF

PREAMBLE

I would tell you that you were nuts. That's right I still cannot believe where I have wound up in life. Anyone who knew me growing up would be thinking the same and laughing hysterically along with me. Honestly, a monk—me?? A MONK!! (And it's a four-letter word even). I will admit it gets a bit confusing here, so let's back up and I'll try to explain how this all happened.

See it was in 1997; I had just gone through a rough break up. That's the nice way of calling it when the fiancée looks at you and says she needs the cocaine more than you so get the fuck out. I got out. Got depressed to. Planned out to kill myself (why else would my home town of Calgary have such lovely bridges over the Bow River?). In the midst of cleaning out (always rude to leave clutter for those you are going to leave behind) that I stumbled upon that little red pocket Bible you were given in grade five by the Gideon's.

It was one of those aha moments; see it was snapped open under clutter in a trunk of mine (see I may not have been a Christian, but there's something about any religions book of scripture that you just can't throw it out). I looked down and saw red, no I wasn't mad, and it was one of those Bibles with the words of Christ in red ink. Kind of eye catching.

Fell on the verses in Matthew 22:34-40...

But when the Pharisees heard Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer asked Him a

question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Okay I got a niggle in the back of my mind. Maybe all those summers at Vacation Bible School was kicking in. I figured I had managed to successfully avoid the whole evil hypocrites in the church my whole life, but my life was over, might as well give it a shot for my last day on the earth, not like I had anything against God, just his fan club if you will.

So I called my Nanny and made arrangements to go to church with her and a family friend that Sunday. I felt good as we entered the building, looked at the watch and did the mental count down to my last breath.

It was weird, the church started, but didn't. Fifteen minutes before hand they did a pre-sing, I didn't last a song. The first hymn up was "Amazing Grace". It was in the words of a wretch being saved, that I saw a man before me in white. He had a simple message for me, "it will be alright, Ty". A simple message that shook me to my core, y'see it was what my Granddad had told me when I was 16 years old and now this other guy was saying it.

My plan was forgotten as I took his hand and accepted his offer of sanity for a split second...what a split second because sanity was not to be in the cards for the ride that lay ahead of me. But in that moment I had no clue what cards I was about to turn over.

Instruments of peace are a unique prayer coming from someone with my background. It is a hard thing to want to pray for...I am a pacifist by training, not by nature. Growing up due to bullying and seeing injustice in the world I tried to solve the problem with my fists.

After over three thousand fights only ever losing due to fighting multiples at once (i.e. five on one, ten on one, being tossed through a plate glass window when I was at a writer's retreat in Banff). But did it really ever solve anything?

In Matthew 5:9 Jesus makes a promise, that blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God.

It is many verses like this one; I believe helped St. Francis of Assisi who was a warrior (he grew up wanting to be a knight) and the realization that battles are not won or lost at the point of a sword, or in my case the end of a fist, but rather in the

heart of the individual with the hand made into a fist or holding the sword (gun for us).

It is in your heart to make the decision that yes you will feel better if you kill the person who attacked your family, perhaps raped your daughter/son. You may feel better to place the person who hit you in intensive care or simply strike them back. But do these actions truly make the world a better place?

Sadly to be like Christ (1) means to live what Christ lived, turning the other cheek. The Golden Rule—treat others, as you would like to be treated. In the case of taking another life or capital punishment there is always the argument that it is best to execute an innocent than to let many guilty go free. Think about it deeply though are you prepared to be that innocent person executed?

Then what does it mean in the second part of the Great Commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves (2). Does this chunk of God's word help one to understand better? It is refocusing your life not on a penal idea of sin, but truly embracing the words Jesus taught us to pray to God.

Lord forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us (3)

To live the forgiving life is part of being a peacemaker. If as Christ's ambassador you cannot live out the forgiveness Christ has given you, how can you hope to bring peace into your home, community, city, nation or world?

It is the thought of being a peacemaker; I opened this chapter pondering if this is something I would want in my life. What is a peacemaker literally?

For a contemporary example (and a nod to Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson who founded them)—United Nations Peace Keepers. They go into a country ravaged by war that says they want peace. Wearing bright blue helmets and armed, but unwilling to open fire. See the U.N. in a hail of bullets does not bring peace; showing love, rebuilding and teaching the people what it means to co-exist together.

But what do peacekeepers endure? Do a web search on recent missions such as Bosnia and Rwanda? Or Somalia? Reflect on what these soldiers endure. They are called blessed by Christ for being eternally stuck in the middle of two sides that want to obliterate one another. Christ called them blessed, would you consider this a blessed existence?

But that leads to the thought can a peacemaker ever use force? Or as the Gospel says when struck on the right cheek we should offer the left cheek (4), with this teaching was it Christ's intention to produce martyrs and door mats on mass?

No. It is in living out the Gospel you can learn the five W's of non-violent intervention in a situation if you will.

Who: On the one assaulting you.

When: Methods such as talking and being non-threatening have failed, and violence is escalating beyond emotional and verbal to the physical.

Where: Between you and the aggressor.

What: A restraint of the person to help mollify them.

Why: Violence will only beget violence, but in years of street ministry I have learned that sometimes a situation will escalate where you and those around you are in imminent danger of harm. Once authorities have been notified it can become necessary to restrain the one acting out till proper help arrives.

With proper restraint it is not done out of anger, or for some fulfillment of joy within you, in fact once this step has been taken should lead to your own repentance before God. But yes sometimes it is necessary and I just wanted to touch on that so one does not think that I am saying there is never the situation, but it is the heart you bring to the situation and the reason behind doing it.

Working through the love commands in the Gospel it bespeaks the heart used in our actions, not the actions themselves because sadly in the fallen world one must act but never as an aggressor.

For the sin lies in the aggression for gratification, this is a lesson I have learned the hard way, as I said I was a scrapper growing up in over three thousand fights on the street. It was the hardest addiction in my life to get release from, because of the rush that flew through my body and one of the things I knew why traditional anger management would not work with me.

In traditional anger management you treat the triggers of what causes the violence, but for one addicted to the fight there is no trigger, it is just done to feel a rush...it literally was an addiction I had to turn over to my higher power and took many years of prayer and reflection to understand pacifism and what it means within a Biblical context.

It all comes down to one's heart. Blessed are the peacemakers, but why are you seeking to be a peacemaker? What method are you using to bring peace? Is your heart being shaped by God or by coveting?

And honestly ask yourself as you pray this opening line in your prayer life—
Do you want to be a peacemaker?

(1.) The Franciscan goal of their ministry is to live the Gospel outwards, and become like Christ.

(2.) As found in Matthew 22:34-40

(3.) Other translations of the Lord's Prayer use debts and debtors, and trespasses and those who trespass against us.

(4.) Matthew 5:43-48