

SEMINAR
PATH OF NONVIOLENCE: TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE

(Pax Christi, Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, DSSUI)
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Your Eminence, My Lord Bishops, My Dear Brothers and Sisters,/My Dear Friends:

I greet you all warmly in the name of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; and on its behalf, I wish this Seminar *Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace* great success.

Very early in the beginning paragraphs of his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato si'*, on Care for our common Home, Pope Francis wrote: “We have come to see ourselves as (the earth’s) her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (*Rom 8:22*). Indeed, “if a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve.” For, completely at odds with the culture of abusive treatment and violence are the treasuries of Christian wisdom, such as, the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus.

Accordingly, in his Message of the World Day of Peace (1 January 2017), Pope Francis formulated this prayer: “*I ask God to help all of us to cultivate*

nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values;” and, as means, Pope Francis went on to say:” May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life”. Indeed, “may the little way of love of St. Therese of Lisieux , the little way of Jesus, guide us: not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship”.

These sentiments of Pope Francis suggest that *Christian nonviolence* may indeed have a face and a name; and that the face and the name is *Jesus, meek and humble of heart!*

The way Jesus teaches us to face violence and conflicts is very unique and striking. Jesus lived in violent times, but did not resort to violence. While announcing the Kingdom of God, he highlighted the power of care and mercy over domination and violence (cf Mt 5: 35-38 and Lk 6:27-36). He blessed the peacemakers (Mt 5: 9), called on us to love everyone, even our enemies (cf. Mt 5: 44; Lk 10: 25-37) and to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39), a command that, according to Pope Benedict XVI, “*is the magna carta of Christian nonviolence*” (Angelus, 18 February 2007). Jesus also rejected the use of violence, even during his passion (cf. Mt 5:39; Lk 23:24); and his cross became a symbol of reconciliation (cf. Rm 5:1-2). Jesus’ resurrection was not a symbol of revenge, but rather a new life that brought the gift of new peace to his community and to the whole of the universe. The resurrection was in fact the ultimate symbol of the victory of love over evil, of active non-violence over violence, of the way of peace over the way of war and vengeance. For, when risen Jesus meets his disciples who abandoned him and fled, he was not vengeful and full of reproach. His was rather a benign, reconciling and a self-endearing greeting of “*peace*” (Jn.20:19-23); and he sends his disciples to share the same!

It is for all these that Jesus called himself “*meek and humble of heart,*” (Mt 11:29) and invited his twelve/seventy-two disciples and disciples of all times to take his yoke on themselves. But in the light of the few observations made above about the ministry of Jesus, the “*meekness*” of Jesus is his total self-abnegation, as a consequence of his incarnation: a self-abnegation that takes two forms,

- total submission (docility) to the Father's will, and totally available for whatever the Father wanted for him.
- total self-control before others (2Cor.10:1, Is.53:7), but not insensible to situation. It is the inner strength, rooted in faith, to overcome anger and fear, as not to respond to injuries, offences, violence.

So, the *meekness* Jesus teaches us, for which he pronounces us *blessed, and with which we can overcome violence consists in two things*: trust in God and inner strength / strength of the soul.

But, it is also for this that the *meekness of Jesus* may not be popular. Nietzsche, for example, described Christian morality in this regard as a *serious crime against life*, and meekness, as *a moral brake on the will for power and self aggrandisement!*

Your Eminence, My Lord Bishops, Dear Friends, in our conversations about "*Path to Nonviolence : Towards a culture of Peace*", let us again recall the words of Pope Francis: "We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint."

Let us learn from the *meekness* of Moses (Nm 12:3; Sirach 45:4).

In describing *nonviolence as path to peace*, we need nothing more or less than "*the very mind of Christ* (Phil 2:5), *and his meekness!*"

Thank you all again for your very generous response to our invitations; and welcome to your new laboratory on *nonviolence as path to peace*.