

Instruments of Peace



Reflections and Prayers

About This Book

Pope John Paul II, prayed The Prayer for Peace during the first “World Day of Prayer for Peace,” held on October 27, 1986.

Spiritual and political leaders from all over the world assembled in Assisi, Italy, the birthplace of Saint Francis of Assisi, for this first, “World Day of Prayer for Peace.” This “World Day of Prayer for Peace” still continues on January 1 of each year. January 1, 2021 was the 35th Anniversary of this tradition.

We need to constantly be praying for the intercession of the Holy Spirit to “lend us a hand” as we seek God’s guidance to become “Instruments of Peace.” Thus, the cover design and the collection of 31 Reflections and Prayers, which follow, reflect our need to become “Instruments of Peace” in our world today.

Bob Harrison and Susie Pace, Co-editors

Prayer for Peace

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy 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.

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,

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

~ St. Francis of Assisi

FOREWORD

“A beautiful prayer to be prayed in Mass” was the first description of the Prayer for Peace when Pope Benedict XV read the Prayer for Peace in 1916. 1916 was the year the Prayer for Peace surfaced in written form as the work of an unknown author.

Pope Benedict XV immediately attributed this prayer to Saint Francis of Assisi, who, in this pope’s opinion, had lived and exemplified this prayer in his daily life.

Although the Prayer for Peace was not added to the Order of the Mass, this prayer is often included in some of the music, liturgical hymns and Prayers of the Faithful, used during the Mass.

Outside the context of the Mass, the use of the Prayer for Peace has spread in popularity to all the major faith traditions, governments and art forms in the world. During His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus even challenges us to become peacemakers when He calls peacemakers the “Children of God.”

The 31 reflection and prayer authors, whose reflections are included in this book, took one small segment of the Prayer for Peace. These authors then paraphrased, applied and developed a prayer for each segment of this prayer to share with you as reader/prayer.

Instruments of Peace is designed to rekindle and reignite a burning desire in all our hearts to become “Instruments of Peace.”

*Lord, make me an
instrument
of thy peace.*

Reflection 1

Make me an Instrument of your Peace

On each threshold, wisdom; At every doorway, love;
Through every entry, grace. With each beginning, peace.
(Jan Richardson, 2010)

Reflection

Playing the flute provided an experience of deep breathing and an awareness of how instruments respond to the musician. In medieval iconography, Christ was pictured as the Divine Musician. What a meaningful comparison to our call to be instruments of peace in the hands of our Divine Musician! Saint Ignatius teaches the application of senses as a way for us be absorbed in union and God's instruments. This poem praising the senses as instruments of peace captures my sentiments:

for eyes that linger to see how Truth applies
for ears that gather all the hurts the joys, the fears
for noses welcoming whether scenting sweat or roses
for lips that promise picnics, parks and other trips
for hands outstretched that offer love a place to stand
-Praise for Instruments of Peace, Arthur O. Roberts

Reflection into Action

Arthur Roberts' poem and Richardson's words show that it's ordinary people that God uses as instruments of peace. It's people who employ what they have—their bodies, breath, senses and voices—to reach out to other people in acts of kindness. It's people like us. How are you letting your body—yourself—act as an instrument of peace among your family members, church community and neighborhood. Today give thanks for the instrument of peace, your body.

Sister Carole Riley, CDP, Ph.D.
WVIS Executive Director
Charleston WV

*Where there is hatred,
let me sow love;*

Reflection 2

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called
the children of God.”

Matthew 5:9-KJV

Reflection:

On January 15, we celebrate the birthday of Reverend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His mantra for us is to believe that we can live in a world where our differences do not divide us but rather unite us. His words, *“Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal;”* are a clear indication of how we can achieve that goal of sowing love everywhere hatred abounds.

“Let me sow!” ... These words convey the message that, individually, we have been given the ability to change the trajectory of how we interact with people of different cultures and backgrounds. Our commitment should be to prayerfully seek ways in which we can sow seeds of love and forgiveness that will reap a harvest of lasting peace for all mankind.

Reflection into Action:

Have within you the fervent, honest desire to resist sowing evil with evil. The garden of the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness faith, etc., (Galatians 5:22). Peaceful behavior is the result of a peaceful inner disposition, that is cultivated and tended by the Holy Spirit. Allow the husbandman of the Holy Spirit to seed your life with peaceable seed.

Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
Friend of WVIS
Charleston, WV

Reflection 3

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

Enlighten the darkness of my heart...
Give me right faith, certain hope and perfect charity...
St. Francis' Prayer of Discernment

Reflection

Perhaps a natural inclination is to retreat from situations of hate, cringing with feelings, even vulnerabilities. St. Francis, having experienced the immensity of God's love, shows us by actions how to fill the vacuum of love - the hate - with actions that plant seeds for love to grow. He unabashedly confronted situations of hate with love: calmness, understanding and reverence for each person.

In the midst of a cease-fire on a battlefield in Egypt, Francis assuredly walked into the Sultan's encampment to speak a word of peace, hoping to turn his heart by love, rather than by force as a Crusader. He intervened for the townspeople of Gubbio terrified by fear personified as a ravenous wolf, taming hatred by words and by his understanding and compassion. As Francis was mortally ill, he was overcome with sorrow by the intense hatred between the leaders of Assisi, the Bishop and the Mayor. He composed a song indicating a way to reconciliation, which was taken to heart and friendship restored.

Reflection into Action

How am I an instrument of peace by filling the vacuums of love by sowing the seeds of love? Once sown, how do I nourish love and encourage calmness, understanding and reverence for each person? Can I pray to God as St. Francis did?

Sister Deborah Lockwood, OSF
WVIS Retreatant

Reflection 4

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

“But I say to you, love your enemies and
pray for those who persecute you,”
Matthew 5:44

Reflection:

One of the most challenging commandments that Jesus gave was the commandment to love our enemies. When we think about the commandments to love others, we mostly think about the commandment to love God with all of our heart, soul, and might, and the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. The commandment to love our enemies is seen as being difficult to obey.

Anger and hatred seem to have pervaded our society. Jesus knew that, if we are to end hatred and violence in our world, we must start by changing ourselves. We, as Christians, are called to model Christ in the world. How can we model Christ's love for our enemies?

Reflection in Action:

Read 1 John 4:7-13 over several times. What sticks out to you about what John says? Are there any words or phrases that draw you to them? Are there any people who come to your mind...people who are easy to love...people who are difficult to love?

Imagine God looking at the people who are difficult. Has God stopped loving them because they're difficult? How does God want you to feel about them?

Take this to God in prayer.

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*Where there is injury,
pardon;*

Reflection 5

Where there is injury, pardon

Reflection

We live in a troubled world. It has been fractured by division. Climate change, systemic racism, making America great again are all polarizing issues. Even Covid 19 has led to either staunch resistance to the guidelines or vaccination envy when I can't get mine fast enough.

Is there anyone who has never been injured? Is there anyone who has never injured another? Is pardon possible? Is reconciliation in sight?

The word reconciliation is derived from the Latin cilia or eyelash. Sometimes it is too difficult to look another person in the eye. The injury inflicted causes a rupture in the relationship that leads to an angry distancing.

Francis of Assisi, in his Letter to a Minister, shared the following: "There should be no one in the entire world who, AFTER LOOKING INTO YOUR EYES, would ever depart without knowing your forgiveness."

Reflection into Action

Spend quiet time looking into God's eyes. See God loving you.

Call to mind someone you have injured or someone who has injured you. Ask for the grace to see them with God's eyes.

Sister Barbara Goodridge, O.S.F.
Spiritual Director
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Reflection 6

Where there is injury, pardon

“If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for the person or thing you resent you will be free!”
Alcoholics Anonymous p. 552

Reflection

John’s Gospel says: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.”-John 20:22, 23.

Some of us tend to read these words as directed solely to ordained ministers and priests. They apply and are available to all of us.

When injured, anger can turn into a well nurtured resentment. Resentments fester and poison our spirit, and block us from God’s light and grace.

Praying for someone against whom we harbor a resentment, especially a “justified” resentment can be particularly challenging. The greater the challenge, the greater the need.

Reflection in Action

Pray for the gift of forgiveness. Pray for the gift of letting go. Pray for the gift of acceptance. When all else fails, pray: “God, grant to them in their lives that which I seek in mine: the peace and serenity to know God’s will.”

Pat Riley, J.D.
Pittsburgh PA.

Reflection 7
Where there is injury, pardon

The Cruellest Injury...

The Crucifixion

The Greatest Pardon...

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”
(Luke 23:34)

Reflection

Initially, an injury inflicted upon us by the hands of another creates a wound that causes pain and suffering. But over time, if we continue to pick at the wound, it begins to swell becoming inflamed and irritated by our inability to forgive, our unwillingness to let go of a slight, and our tendency to hold grudges. Slowly, we are infected with the poison of our own anger that rises in our hearts and destroys our peace of mind; ruminating on one hurt after another destroys our spiritual well-being leaving us distraught and emotionally unhealthy.

Reflection into Action

Jesus experienced betrayal, abandonment and excruciating physical abuse, but He released it all from His heart with His sincere and unconditional forgiveness. This example of forgiveness is what we all must strive to imitate. Pardoning an offense or forgiving a fault is a life-saving balm that soothes our inflamed and irritated souls! Examine your heart today...let go of slights, release old grudges, and forgive.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds
on the heel that has crushed it.” Mark Twain

Father Sebastian Embrayil Devasya
Pastor of Sacred Heart Parishes
Bluefield and Princeton, West Virginia

*Where there is doubt,
faith;*

*Where there is despair,
hope;*

Reflection 8

Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope

“And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”- I. Corinthians 13:13.

Reflection

Living through times of doubt and confusion brings us to a deeper commitment to our faith. When the pain of suffering takes us down into the depths of despair, hope lights our pathway to acceptance. Hope in the promise of resolution comforts us through the hard times of our lives. Faith undergirds the very depths of our hearts with a spiritual knowing that we, as children of God, the Divine Creator, will never be abandoned.

Love draws us outside ourselves; to engage and enjoy, and to bring care and comfort to those who share the day-to-day journey of our lives. We live simply, moment-to-moment, in relationship with God and our neighbors. Giving thanks for the gift of this life awakens the love of God within. The power of this love strengthens us to help others to stay true to who they are through their times of doubt and despair. With God’s love we also deepen our own faith, hope and love. In the best of times these three joins within us in a joyful dance of happiness and love.

Reflection into Action

Once each day share some time with someone just to be with them. Listen. Try to understand. Pray for them.

Once each day acknowledge a passing stranger with a smile. It helps.

Charlie Boll
WVIS Spiritual Director

Reflection 9

Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope

“...I can tell you, the worst part of my doubt and despair was the utter isolation.”

George Aiello, Jr.

Reflection

George Aiello recently described an experience of total doubt and despair after he had been admitted to the hospital with Covid-19, in critical condition. As the lab and x-ray reports were looking dim, he became fearful that he would be placed on a ventilator and face his own death.

He gasped for breath as he frantically called his wife and four children to say goodbye, via facetime on his phone. Afterward, he felt immense despair as he longed to be with them, and to feel the reassurance that he would survive.

He felt doubt that he would survive. He felt so alone. As he looked at his phone again, he noticed hundreds of messages from friends, family, and strangers, all of whom knew of his plight, and urged him to fight with the reassurance that they were praying for him. He found himself reading and rereading the messages whenever doubt and despair overtook him.

It was then that he found his own strength of calming prayer with immense gratitude. He was so humbled by the many people praying with him. It was their reassurance that helped him regain his faith and hope.

Reflection in Action

Spend a few moments thinking about those who may be experiencing a time of doubt and despair. Send them a message (spoken or written) of hope.

Mary Malamisura
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Reflection 10

Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope

Reflection

“Where there is doubt faith:” Faith and doubt seem like one of those things that just can’t mix. Yet at the same time, there is always an experience that some kind of doubt can be put on a faiths journey. For example,

- Abraham and Sarah doubted God’s promise of a child; actually they laughed at it.
- Job doubted God’s goodness.
- Moses doubted God could use him to lead Israel out of Egypt.
- The Nation of Israel seemed to be in a constant state of doubt.
- Thomas, Jesus’ disciple, doubted Jesus rose from the dead.

Reflection into Action:

Pray the Opening of the Prayer of St Francis:

The Prayer of St. Francis

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

Denise Myers
Lombard IL/Grafton WV

Reflection 11

Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope

“We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home any who have lost their way.”

Saint Francis to the First Friars, Legend of the Three Companions,
Number 58

Reflection

This quote from Saint Francis of Assisi is perhaps the mission of the disciple in 2021. Healing the wounds of racism, the trauma that has been caused by the pandemic, the abuse of power, and sexual abuse of the church takes courage and faith to see in the woundedness of each situation the power of God’s ever abiding presence and mercy.

God speaks hope to our woundedness when we seek to “unite what has fallen apart” and we “bring home those who have lost their way.” As we seek to bring hope to despair and faith where there is doubt, let us not forget that God is calling us to heal, unite, and bring home the lost, in whatever way we can. May we be God’s instruments of healing, unity, homecoming and peace.

Reflection into Action

Heal- what wound is God calling me to heal today?

Unite- what relationships have fallen away and need to be reunited?

Bring Home the Lost- who or what has been lost in my life that I need to bring back to right relationship?

Tom Octave, MM
Spiritual Direction Intern
Lower Burrell, PA

*Where there is darkness,
light;*

*Where there is sadness,
joy.*

Reflection 12

Where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy

“The moon does not fight. It attacks no one. It does not worry. It does not try to crush others. It keeps to its course, but by its very nature, it gently influences. What other body could pull an entire ocean from shore to shore? The moon is faithful to its nature and its power is never diminished.”

Deng Ming-Dao

Reflection

I have always been fascinated by the moon. On a solitary night, it has the ability to light up the darkest sky. The moon is mysterious and ever-changing. It goes through phases; occasionally appearing full, bright and joyful. Other times, it is a sliver of itself appearing weak, dull and sad. Interestingly enough, the moon does not produce its own light; it is only a reflection of the sun.

We are very similar to the moon, aren't we? We are ever-changing, undergoing different phases and only producing light in the world when we reflect the “Son.” Consider your spiritual life for a moment. Are you at peace with God when you are a sliver of yourself – weak, dull and sad? How is God working differently in your life when you are full, bright and joyful?

Reflection into Action

Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” How can we be instruments of peace reflecting Christ's light into the world? Transforming darkness to light? Sadness into joy? Simple, imitate the moon! Do not fight, attack no one, do not worry, do not try to crush others. Keep your course, by your Godly nature, gently influence others. Remain faithful to Jesus and your power will never diminish.

Gina Preservati Boggess
Catechetical Leader, Princeton Sacred Heart
WVIS Spiritual Director Intern
Princeton, WV

Reflection 13

Where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy

“Peace, Peace,” they say, “when there is no peace”
Jeremiah 6:13-14

Reflection

“Peace, Peace, when there is no peace” was the Scripture passage, Patrick Henry cited in his American Revolutionary War Speech, entitled “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death.”

Patrick Henry gave this speech on March 23, 1775 during the Virginia Convention. Yet, the content of Patrick Henry’s speech shows then that he was and is now an early “Instrument of Peace” in our country.

Patrick Henry believed the only way the colonists could achieve peace and survive was to sever all ties with England. He further challenged us to take down any walls that divide us so that God’s light might shine through. God wants to turn our darkness and sadness into the light of joy.

What are some of the walls that divide us within and among ourselves? Are they the walls of abuse, addiction, poverty, racism, sexism, apathy or indifference? No matter what our walls, we must ask God to humbly remove these walls so we too can be better “Instruments of Peace” in our world today.

Reflection into Action

God show me where I have built walls that block me from Your love.
Remove these walls by turning these walls into joy.

Bruce Neal, Executive Director
West Virginia Reading Association
Charleston, West Virginia

Reflection 14

Where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy

There is no such thing as darkness, just an absence of light.
Although an object may appear dark, it is likely bright at a frequency that humans cannot perceive.

Black Body Radiation Theory

Reflection

You cannot find peace in darkness. It is our task to practice peace in the way of God and dispel the darkness and promote peace by choosing to live in gratitude, love, and a celebration of life, finding joy in all things God has created. Once there is peace within, then we are able to help create a world at peace. But, until we wrestle with darkness within us, we cannot dispel the darkness outside. It is our internal hate, anger and distrust that ultimately fuels the unrest in the world. As God created order out of chaos to make the world, we must continue to heed His call to bring order and peace within ourselves so as to dispel the darkness within and then to find the joy with bringing peace to the world.

Reflection in Action

Say the prayer out loud below and then reflect on how you will begin to bring light and joy to the world. Journal your thoughts and response.

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work but neither are you free to abandon it.

The Talmud

Patricia (PJ) Scarr
WVIS Spiritual Director Intern
Huntington, WV

Reflection 15

Where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy

Peace for our Young Adults

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."- John 20:19

Reflection

Our college students are preparing to become the leaders of our future society. Through my music classes, God is providing an opportunity to be an instrument of peace for the students. The global pandemic has put our young adults under extraordinary pressure as they struggle with the challenges of online learning, social distancing, and the fear of catching the coronavirus. Thanks to Professor Emeritus Sister Carole Riley and WVIS, this process of reflection encourages actions to help our students achieve greater peace. What are some ways to help our young adults reduce their anxiety and fear?

Reflection into Action

In our classes, we stress the importance of maintaining social activity by seeking ways to connect with and help others. We encourage exercise and getting fresh air, healthy eating, being optimistic, having a sense of humor, and consistently improving our spiritual lives. When we pursue those goals, research shows that our stress levels are lower, and we improve opportunities to receive the peace that Jesus offered His disciples and the world. As our students and world struggle with the pandemic, we ask God to help us be open to receive the words of our Savior, "Peace be with you."

Edward Kocher, Ph.D., Professor
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit
Pittsburgh, PA

*Grant that I may not
so much seek to be
consoled,
as to console;*

Reflection 16

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console

“Remember, it’s not about you”- P. Steelhammer

Reflection

Everyone experiences the need for consolation. Consolation is necessary for one’s soul to continue to live. For mere mortals, the most effective method of learning how to console is to be lovingly consoled.

A young girl wants a puppy for Christmas but, instead, gets a really “cool” bike. The soccer team lost, but they stop after the game for pizza. It’s been a rough week, and coffee ice cream with chocolate chips is well deserved pleasure. A really “cool” bike, a pizza, and ice cream do not console. They distract.

Telling someone, who is bereft about the necessity of euthanizing their beloved dog, they can always get another dog is not consolation. It totally dismisses the feelings of the grief of losing a loved one, no matter what the species.

To tell a grieving mother that “at least he is in a better place” or to tell a bereft spouse “time heals all wounds” is not consolation. It is cruel and disrespectful.

Authentic consolation requires and expresses sincere love and caring, empathy, and the ability and willingness to listen. The ability to console is one of the most loving actions that can contribute to healing the wounds of the people in our world.

Reflection into Action

Console someone from your heart to their soul

Pam Steelhammer, M.A., M.B.A.
Charleston, West Virginia

Reflection 17

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all”-Romans 12:17

Reflection

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” As Jesus tells his disciples to not be troubled, He is comforting them. Remember Jesus walked this earth for thirty-three years and experienced the same trials and tribulations that we face. He knows and understands what it is like to hurt. We can take great comfort in knowing that we have a Savior who intercedes on our behalf not only out of omniscience, but out of experience.

Reflection into Action

The book of James opens with the admonition to “consider it pure joy” when we face trials and tribulations of many kinds. This is a great perspective to have in the midst of all of the difficulties surrounding this life. If we have a proper understanding of comfort, we realize that God can use our struggles to comfort those around us. What a privilege we have to show others the love of God as we comfort others!

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Scott Depot, WV

Reflection 18

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console

“I have become all things to all, to save at least some.”

– 1 Corinthians 9:22b

Reflection

God gives us the remarkable gift of consolation through our times when we needed to be consoled. We rescue others in their discomfort by our ability to spiritually place ourselves into their situation. When someone is hurting, suffering, or conflicted, we both experience the concerns. You do the absolute best you can with what is presented to you to help by adjusting as you go. Christ's peace frees us from our anxieties and gives us the strength to ease other's issues.

When we offer consolation, we also encounter the riches of God. When we use the example of St. Paul, we are able to enter into a loop of grace with the Lord and become all things to all. We raise others to a higher pitch of perfection. Consolation is not passive. It calls each of us to sense and share another's apprehensions. We can experience God's love by improving people's belief in themselves. The Lord will watch with particular tenderness over all your cares. The smallest relief or support we are able to extend can sometimes make someone feel completely different about themselves. Your intervention of this sliver of the Divine conveyed may make that one part better for them. As humans, life may sometimes seem disconnected, but genuine consolation can bring us back to amazing moments.

Reflection into Action

Choose one person in your life that you could provide consolation and exchange an authentic transformative energy.

Julia Harrison, M.A.A.T.
Pastoral Associate
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*To be understood,
as to understand;*

Reflection 19

To be understood as to understand

After the Resurrection, two of the disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). They didn't recognize the risen Jesus. He gave them the gift of understanding. He opened their minds to all the Scriptures that pertained to Him so that they too could believe and understand (Lk 24:13-32).

Reflection

The Holy Spirit's gift of understanding helps us recognize: God, others, self, the world, love, and life in new ways. To understand is to recognize the deeper meaning of God, the other and perhaps the self.

What greater experience is there than to be listened to, understood, and cared for compassionately when we share what is in our hearts? Thus, what has been given to us, we should freely give as a gift.

The yearning of the human heart is to be understood by another. Have you ever experienced the desire and yearning to have someone understand you as your heart breaks, when there is no one to grasp the pain in your heart? When a child cries and we don't know why? Or, finding ourselves in a foreign country and not recognizing the language, loss of life at the depth no one understands, these too are certainly painful, disappointing experiences. Yet, God understands our every thought, desire and movement.

Reflection into Action

Today I will listen attentively and be present to another person yearning to be understood.

Sister Ritamary Schulz, ASCJ
WVIS Spiritual Director

Reflection 20

To be understood as to understand

“Great Spirit, grant that I may not criticize my neighbor
until I have walked a mile in his moccasins.”

Native American Plain Proverb

Reflection

The St. Francis prayer resonates with me in so many ways. When I was asked to prepare a reflection on the phrase “that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand”, I smiled. Of all the charges in this prayer, perhaps this one rings loudest to me...the ability to understand rather than just to be understood. Most perspectives of being understood suggest authoritarianism -- “Let me make myself perfectly clear...”, “The company car can only be used for business related purposes.”

But to understand can be a challenge. The native American phrase, “walk a mile in my moccasins” is well advised. Before jumping to conclusions or judgments when responding to unexpected or unpredictable behaviors, learn to pause and ask, “What dynamics are happening within or to this person that you are totally unaware of?” So, ask God to help *you* understand what you thought was clearly understood. This opens the door for empathy, forgiveness, even grace. Especially, in our world today, the “instrument” of *understanding* is important -- nationally, culturally, and, yes, even politically.

To be understood is not equal to understand. To understand starts by being shrouded in the ability to empathize. Often, to understand begins simply as grace.

Reflection into Action

God help me always to search for understanding especially when I don't understand and quiet myself to listen so that others can be better understood.

Dr. Ray Lowther
St. John's Episcopal Church--Senior Warden
Charleston, West Virginia

Reflection 21

To be understood as to understand

Reflection

More than once I have inadvertently set off a firestorm. A simple misunderstanding would lead to hurt feelings and rifts that never fully healed. I would be blindsided by the anger coming from the other party and feel attacked, then, in my hurt and embarrassment, I would dig in and make a banner of my own righteous anger.

A few weeks ago an email chain caused an uproar with some people I know. I tried to apply St. Ignatius' admonition to presume the good will of the other party, but the longer the chain got, the harder it was to hold on to a spirit of generosity. Eventually, it occurred to me to ask the parties what they were feeling when they wrote their responses – rather than lashing out, as I had thought, they had taken defensive postures because they were embarrassed and afraid.

Reflection in Action

Take to prayer today a situation where you felt misunderstood. Ask God to help you put aside your own defensiveness so that you might imagine the most generous interpretation of the other person's point of view. Notice where else God might be inviting you to do the same.

Liz Deal

Associate Spiritual Director WVIS

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*To be loved,
as to love;*

Reflection 22

To be loved, as to love

What the world needs now is love sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No not just for some, but for everyone
Hal David & Burt Bacharach (1965)

Reflection

Loving is the action that calls us out of our comfort zones! Love invites the stranger, who shows up unexpectedly, to know there is the hope of being accepted and cared for without harsh judgment of not having it together. Love is looking out for the marginalized person who has no one to advocate for their basic needs. Love is the tenderness of welcoming the broken parts of ourselves before a tender and loving God who loves us unconditionally.

Reflection into Action

Call to mind a person who has believed in you and loved you into the person you are today. Find a song that best describes this love. Reflect on the words of the song and bring your song and your gratitude before God. Feel the peace and joy. If that special person is alive, share your song and gratitude with them.

Sister Linda Hylla, CDP, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Madison School District 12

Reflection 23

To be loved, as to love

“The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” – John 6:33.

Reflection

True love is to enter the ministry of giving; giving oneself for the sake of the “other” altruistically. Love never thinks about what it will receive but only what it can give.

When thoughts are turned to self, perfect love ceases to exist, for true love is never self-centered or self-seeking. True love is centered around Christ and the “other”.

The ministry of love is to come down. As the waters flow from the mountain tops to the valley to give life, all are invited to freely receive from its refreshment. The water expects nothing in return; only to give to all who come. When we receive life from the Life Giver, He gives us the desire to come down to love and serve others without expectation. We simply give.

Reflection into Action

Christ came down from His kingly position to give us life. We are invited to come down from our earthly status to live a life of outpouring love through service to those He places in our lives each day. Today I ask God for opportunities to use my ministry of love in service to others.

Becky Hill, MA in Professional Counseling
WVIS Spiritual Director Intern
Troutville, VA

Reflection 24

To be loved, as to love

“I see love as a potential spiritual experience – to see and be seen as we really are – beyond what we each appear to be. To love is to recognize the divine in another person, and with that recognition, dedication, compassion and caring flow naturally. To be loved this way is like coming home, finding your authentic self and discovering that you are not alone.”

Positive Potential Medicine By Davidicus Wong M.D.

Reflection

“To Love is to find the Divine in another person.” Most certainly, we believers in Christ Jesus, understand through the Gospels that God is Love. Love creates out of Love and sustains creation in Love. If we think of it this way, God the creator holds everything, everybody in existence. God is existence itself. God’s Love for what or whom God creates is how we each are held in existence. We are surrounded by God’s Love for what God holds in existence. Let me put it this way. God is existence God’s self and if we are held IN EXISTENCE, then we are held in God. We proclaim God is Love and thus we are held in Love itself.

Reflection into Action

Today, meditate on how God holds you in existence and how God, who is Love itself, holds you in Love and allow that Love to flow out of you.

Deacon Thomas Soper
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director Intern
Toledo, Ohio

*For it is in giving
that we receive;*

Reflection 25

For it is in giving, that we receive

GIVING is another word for **LOVING**. In that sense, we are called to be giving constantly in our lives as people of faith and people who believe in God... God who *IS* love.

Edited from <https://dioceseoftrenton.org/stewardship>

Reflection

What would you have to give in today's world to help spread and receive love? How can you, as one person give to those in need? What can you give to those in need? Where can you give to those in need? When can you give to those in need?

When thinking about giving the many Time-Talent-Treasures campaigns held in my parish came forth. Giving does not just involve monetary donations. Giving also involves the giving of time and our God-given talents. What can you give/share to spread God's love?

Reflection in Action

Read the following quote several times. Spend some time praying, asking God for His guidance to 'live a life for others'. Journal what comes to you. Come back to what you have written frequently – are you giving more of yourself?

"We often live as if our happiness depended on having. But I don't know anyone who is really happy because of what he or she has. True joy, happiness, and inner peace come from the giving of ourselves to others. A happy life is a life for others." — Henri J.M. Nouwen, Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World

Margaret (Susie) Pace, M.Ed., M.A.
WVIS Friend
Princeton, WV

Reflection 26

For it is in giving, that we receive

“A righteous man cares for the needs of his animals . . .”
-Proverbs 12:10 NIV

Reflection

St. Francis of Assisi, a Christian patron saint of animals emphasized reverence and adoration for all creatures. This is still evident today with the international day of action for animal rights and welfare which is held annually on October 4th, the Feast of Saint Francis.

What path do we follow so that others may receive the blessings of food, shelter, mere recognition . . . the little things that so many of us take for granted? We have each been given certain talents/gifts to use in order help others through hard times. No truer words have been spoken than the following:

"Animals are the bridge between us and the beauty of all that is natural. They show us what's missing in our lives, and how to love ourselves more completely and unconditionally. They connect us back to who we are, and to the purpose of why we're here." — Trisha McCagh

Reflection into Action

As people of faith, we are called to love, be compassionate and show God's light through our actions. To help resonate and profess the Prayer of Peace, let us all take part in the effort of volunteering, rescuing and caring for the sick and the abandoned. These small acts can lead us to a sense of awareness and appreciation not only for all animals, but for our fellow man.

Dustin and Bridgette Crites
Elkview, West Virginia

Reflection 27

For it is in giving, that we receive

“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! plans to give you a future full of hope.”
(Jeremiah 29:11)

“Our own effort will consist in sifting and sorting out everything that is not essential and that fills up space and silence in us and in discovering what sort of shape this emptiness in us, is. From this we shall learn what sort of purpose God has for us.”
-The Reed of God by Caryll Houselander.

Reflection

Jeremiah’s words in the quote above gives hope to the exiles whose world had been turned upside down. His words are given for us as well. Our country is in the plight of a pandemic.

A quote from Houselander’s book noted above, sheds light on the ordinary throughout time, have brought about the will of God.

At conception, we are formed from bits and pieces of our ancestors. When space is provided for God to dwell in this raw material, an instrument of God emerges, over time. Presence, words, and actions are no longer ours—only that which dwells within. **For it is in giving (purposefully emptying of self) that we receive.**

Reflection in Action

O’ Creator, enter these bits and pieces that I am; by your grace Lord, room will be made for you.

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*It is in pardoning that
we are pardoned,*

*It is in dying that
we are born
to eternal life.*

Reflection 28
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life

Humility is an attitude of honesty with God, oneself, and of all reality.
It enables us to be at PEACE in the presence of our powerlessness
And to rest in the forgetfulness of self. -Thomas Keating

...Without me you can do nothing ---John 15:5

Reflection

Humility is the path away from self-reliance, arrogance...and towards what unites us in peace with the vine and the branches. Our sinfulness—separation—leads us to realize, “We are incapable of fulfilling our destiny by ourselves.” (New Seeds of Contemplation, p.180).

In this prayer, we begin to move from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. We cannot give what we do not have so we ask The Giver of Peace, Love, and Humility (truthfulness) for what we need.

Humility is truth. (St. Teresa of Avila). Humility is the way to co-create the relationship of Creator/ created, Lover/loved, Teacher/disciple, and Master/servant. Humility creates a person in wisdom and peace. Humility opens the way to peacefulness with Jesus and others. “Learn of me for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your soul” (Matt 11:29). There can be no authentic peace without humility.

Reflection into Action

Almighty and Merciful God, grant us to seek peace where it is truly found! In your will. O God, is our peace!
(Thomas Merton, Passion for Peace, p 327)

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Reflection 29

**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life**

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace...
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life.
~Francis of Assisi

Reflection

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is a beautiful prayer, poem, and song. The ending is all about pardoning and dying to self. And, how do we pardon? If I am pardoned, I'm forgiven for what I might have done. And, in pardoning, I forgive others for what they might have done.

Jesus teaches of us unconditional forgiveness. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." (Luke 6:37). And, how do we die to self? One way is: letting go and trusting that we can turn to God and ask for His guidance throughout our life.

Reflection in Action

Sometimes it's easy to forgive someone. And, sometimes it's not. Spend a minute with the following quote from Leo Nikolayovich Tolstoy:

"Let us forgive each other – only then will we be able to live in peace."

God, help me be an instrument of your peace by accepting and giving forgiveness and in letting go of self and trusting You.

Elaine Soper, Ph.D.
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Reflection 30
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life

FORGIVENESS IS THE WAY OF PEACE

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:”-Mt.6:14

Reflection

We all know the West Nickel Mines story of forgiveness when a milk truck driver shot ten Amish girls and killed himself in a schoolhouse on October 2, 2006. Five of the girls lived.

The Amish went to the shooter’s parents home bringing hugs, food and forgiveness that night.

A large group of Amish came to the shooter’s funeral and literally surrounding the family with their presence and their love.

What we may not know is that the shooter’s widow, Marie, now helps to care for one of the girls who suffered a severe head wound and is confined to a wheelchair.

Like the Amish and like the father of the Prodigal Son story in the Bible, forgiveness must be complete, without any reservation, if we are to be at home with our Heavenly Father. Heaven awaits us, as the way to peace is total forgiveness.

Reflection into action

“Father in heaven, we forgive with reckless abandon, those who have hurt us, as it will deepen our hearts and strengthen Your love in the way of peace.”

Deacon Peter Minogue
Hinton, West Virginia



Reflection 31

Closing Reflection

Reflection

“Go in Peace, glorifying the Lord by your life” is the sending forth of the people of God at the conclusion of the Mass in the Roman rite. Reflecting on these words seems appropriate for the conclusion of the previous thirty reflections. Yet how many of us reflect on these words...as we look for the pages in a songbook for the Concluding Hymn...buttoning our coats to make a dash for the Church door?

God really wants us to go in peace with self and one another...not in some unrealistic tranquility but with the conviction that God is with us, that we are not alone, and that Christ suffers with us and sustains us. As we go through our daily life, doing all the good we do, caring for our children and older members of our families, helping our neighbors, we can be at peace with our God.

Reflection in Action

How will we live into action what we have pondered, “glorifying the Lord by your life”?

...sowing love...pardoning...living faithful lives...hoping
...bringing light...joyful living...consoling
...understanding ...giving...pardoning...bringing to life

Loving with no limits is key and yet we must admit that differences in personality and our socio-economic backgrounds may have impacted us in some negative ways. Valerie Kaur in her book, See No Stranger, shows us how to begin by seeing the other person with *wonder*. “It is to look upon the face of anyone and choose to say: *You are a part of me I do not yet know*. Wonder is the wellspring for love. Who we wonder about determines whose stories we hear and whose joy and pain we share. Those we grieve with, those we sit with and weep with, are ultimately those we organize with and advocate for.” We create “a solidarity rooted in love”.

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