January 1st, 2017
World Day of Peace & Mary, Holy Mother of God

Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, & 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21

By Thad Crouch, Consistent Life Network

The Christmas song entitled "Mary Did You Know?" asks if Mary knew the great things we now know her baby boy would do as the adult Jesus in the Gospel stories. Our Gospel reading tells us Mary reflected in her heart about the shepherds’ amazing story of an angel’s message about her son being the Messiah, and even “peace on earth.”

We might also reflect on how Mary’s baby, the Gospel stories of the adult Jesus, and “peace on earth” are connected.

St. Paul’s letter gives us clues when he writes that through Jesus, God both ransoms and adopts slaves to religious legal codes so we can know ourselves as children of a loving God Whom we can relate to affectionately as Daddy! Through Jesus, a rigid spirituality of legalism is replaced by a spirituality of relationship.

Jesus relates to everyone as invited to be his sisters and brothers in this adopted family no matter what legal codes or culture says about them. He touched lepers and spoke with a Samaritan and women who were not blood relatives. He dined with tax collectors and healed someone for an occupying enemy soldier. Jesus showed us a just, merciful, loving, and relatable God to Whom all human lives matter, whether sick, small children, women, people of other races, people who exploit others, and even enemies.

Mary’s Christmas baby is connected to peace on earth because Jesus taught us to love one another – all people, even our enemies -- as he has loved us. That is the way to peace. Love based in the inherent value God has in all people. Jesus shows the way to peace and Jesus is the way to peace.

Our first reading asks God to bless the people by giving them peace, and God and Mary give us peace in Jesus.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. His forgiveness offers us inner peace from sin and his example offers peace on earth.

Peace is a fruit of justice. Justice is rooted in respecting the sanctity and dignity of life.

When U.S. Catholic peace activist Kathy Kelley visited a Catholic girl’s school Baghdad amidst 1998 US missile attacks, she asked the girls what message they would like to tell American children. One girl said she’d like to tell the American children to tell their parents to tell the President to stop killing children in Iraq. Then girl sat down and wept.

Can you imagine any action taken by our president, that you think would justify another nation or group bombing our neighborhoods and killing our children?
Modern warfare kills many children and civilians, not just combatants. UNICEF says 80-90% of deaths in modern warfare are civilians\(^1\). In Syria, many sides in the conflict, including the U.S., have killed civilians.

Even when the causes of a war might be just, the conduct of modern warfare is perhaps never just because it kills so many civilians. Which is why Pope Benedict XVI (as Cardinal Ratzinger) said “…given the new weapons that make possible destructions that go beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a ‘just war.’”\(^2\)

The culture of death belittles life by referring to civilians in war as “collateral damage” and unborn babies as “products of conception.”

*To follow Jesus is to be pro-peace. To be pro-peace is to be pro-life.*

By following Jesus, the Church developed her consistent life ethic which calls us to protect life from all threats to life and dignity such abortion, euthanasia, poverty, war, racism, the death penalty, and now, even threats to God’s life-sustaining creation.

Today Pope Francis says to us in his message for the 50th annual World Day of Peace\(^3\), “To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.” In his message, “Nonviolence: A style of politics for peace”, he says “Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence” and “walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility.”\(^4\)

He reminds us that even living in violent times, Jesus “preached God’s unconditional love,” forgave others, and stopped Peter from using his sword to prevent Jesus’s arrest and violent execution.\(^5\)

Now Francis, Peter’s successor, is telling us to start using nonviolence so that we might more often use creative, bloodless, nonviolent means to protect life, and he’s telling us to look to the Sermon on Mount as a manual.\(^6\)

Centuries ago, the early church practiced nonviolence even in the face of martyrdom. They refused to take part in abortion, infanticide and many refused to join the Roman military. As a matter of fact, St. Martin of Tours, who is the patron saint of soldiers, is also the first known Christian soldier to become a conscientious objector.

Decades ago, some U.S. Catholics participated in the nonviolent civil rights movement that increased legal protection of human dignity.

Thirty-four years ago, our US Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote: “The vision of Christian nonviolence is not passive about injustice and the defense of the rights of others.”\(^4\)

Twenty-seven years ago, Pope John Paul II wrote,

> It seemed that the European order resulting from the Second World War . . . could only be overturned by another war. Instead, it has been overcome by the nonviolent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth.\(^5\)

Twenty-four years ago, our US Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote,
[Nonviolence] ought not be confused with popular notions of nonresisting pacifism. For it consists of a commitment to resist manifest injustice and public evil with means other than force. These include dialogue, negotiations, protests, strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience and civilian resistance.  

The bishops also pointed to Eastern Europe and to the Philippines as examples of political nonviolence bringing peace.

Ten years ago, Pope Benedict XVI beatified Blessed Franz Jagerstatter, who was beheaded by Germany in 1943 for refusing to fight an unjust war.

Today, Pope Francis, being consistent, calls us to abolish both nuclear weapons and domestic violence as both abuse life. 

Today, we might realize that if we are one human family and the earth is our common home, then all violence & injustice are domestic abuse, and we can use nonviolence to create a safe, happy home.

Today Pope Francis writes, “in 2017, may we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds.”  

Today, Pope Francis takes following Jesus’s way of peace to mean “choosing solidarity as a way of making history” and “showing that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict.”

Currently there is a movement to create a new title for Mary, which promotes global solidarity, “The Lady of All Nations.”

Today, we might ask, “Mary did you know your baby boy would inspire a global message of nonviolence for peace on earth?”

Today we celebrate Mary as The Holy Mother of God on the World Day of Peace, we might pray the Lady of All Nations Prayer for life, justice, peace and nonviolence:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father,  
send now Your Spirit over the earth.  
Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of all nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disaster and war.  
May the Lady of All Nations, the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
be our Advocate. Amen.

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3. Pope Francis, Nonviolence: A Style of Politics For Peace-Message for the 50th World Day Of Peace, 1 January 2017
5. Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 1 May 1991
7. Pope Francis, Nonviolence: A Style of Politics For Peace-Message for the 50th World Day Of Peace, 1 January 2017