April 9, 2017
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

By Marie Dennis

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was a powerful demonstration of creative, strategic nonviolence and a carefully choreographed repudiation of Messianic triumphalism. In sharp contrast to the military extravaganza that might have been staged by the Roman occupiers – and probably disappointing some of his followers who expected the beginning of the Davidic temple state, Jesus, the King, rode into the city as Zechariah predicted, meek and riding on an ass.

Completely consistent with the thrust of his public ministry and with his message to those of us who follow, Jesus’ street theater, which introduces our own Holy Week of high drama, was a powerful public liturgy loaded with political and social significance and culminating his long and deliberate journey toward the center of religious and political power in first century Palestine.

The profound threat to an unjust status quo levied by Jesus’ message and ministry and his persistent call for a welcoming discipleship community that rejected the exclusionary practices of both political and religious authorities made his deliberately nonviolent and triumphal approach to Jerusalem unbearably threatening to those in power. The plot to kill him thickened.

Yet, all the way to the cross, Jesus demonstrated the power of nonviolence and insisted that his followers do the same: Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. (Matthew 26: 52)

In a world overwhelmed by violence, we are invited to follow in his footsteps: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44

Active nonviolence is a positive and powerful force for social change, a process for ending violence without lethal force; for transforming conflict; and for protecting the vulnerable. People throughout the world have used active nonviolence to end injustice and foster reconciliation, to resist war and build peace, to safeguard the infinite worth of the human person, and to care for creation.

In his 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis wrote: “To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.” Then he quoted his predecessor Benedict XVI: “For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God’s love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution’”.
During this Holy week, read the newspaper and listen to the news about our broken world with close attention. Celebrate the dramatic liturgies of these days conscious of the context in which we live and listening for the ways that Jesus’ example might guide our contemporary response.

Marie Dennis is Co-President of Pax Christi International