

The Road to Peace and Justice:  
Following the Nonviolent Jesus  
By John Dear, S.J.

Thank you very much, dear friends, for all you do for the church, for peace and justice and for Jesus. You are a gift to the church, and your vocation as deacons, diaconate directors and church workers is so important, especially in these times of war and injustice, and the church scandals. I'd like to reflect with you about the world and violence, about Jesus and nonviolence, and tell some stories from my own journey on the road to peace and justice.

1. Called to Live the Beatitudes, Israel, 1982

I'm 42 years old, and entered the Jesuits 20 years ago. After I graduated from Duke University, just before I entered the Jesuits, I decided to go on a private pilgrimage to the Holy Land to see where Jesus lived. So in the summer of 1982, I went to JFK airport to begin my pilgrimage and just as the plane was to take off, the pilot announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, Israel has just invaded Lebanon," and I found myself walking into a land of war.

While camping out at the Sea of Galilee, I visited the Chapel of the Beatitudes, where I read on the walls the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice. Love your enemies."

Suddenly, I thought, "Oh my God, I think he's serious!"

I walked out onto the balcony, looked up at the sky and said, "God, are you trying to tell me something? Do you want even me to be a peacemaker, to hunger and thirst for justice? Ok, I promise to dedicate myself to these Beatitudes and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount--on one condition, if you give me a sign!"

Just then, there were loud explosions as several Israeli jets fell from the sky setting off sonic booms, and flew over the Sea of Galilee, coming right at me and over me. I looked up at the sky and said, "Ok God, I'll work for peace and justice and I'll never ask for a sign again." The next week, I entered the Jesuits, started working for peace and justice, began years of organizing demonstrations against war and working among the poor in soup kitchens, shelters and community centers, and traveling into the

world's war zones and giving talks and getting arrested over 75 times for nonviolent civil disobedience against U.S. war making. In other words, it's been downhill ever since.

## 2. Proclaim the Reign of God, Denounce the anti-reign of war, El Salvador, 1985

In 1985, I went to El Salvador to live and work in a refugee camp during the civil war, at the invitation of the Jesuits at the University in San Salvador. The great Jesuit theologian and university president, Ignacio Ellacuria, said to me on my first day, "The purpose of the Jesuit University in El Salvador is promote the reign of God. But you can no longer be for the reign of God unless you are also publicly actively against the anti-reign. You cannot claim to be for peace and justice unless you are publicly actively against war and injustice."

I was very impressed. I visited their house, heard their stories of countless death threats and saw the bullet holes where they were strafed. They were giving their lives against the U.S. war in El Salvador, against poverty, and against violence. I spent that summer serving suffering refugees in a camp, witnessing their faith and love, and speaking to the death squads.

On November 16, 1989, six of those Jesuits were brutally assassinated by soldiers trained and funded by the United States government, at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia.

Their mission is our mission. Like the Jesuit martyrs, we too have to proclaim the reign of God, to work for peace and justice, and thus, to stand against the anti-reign, to work publicly actively against war and injustice.

## 3. The world is addicted to violence, war and death.

Besides the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, the U.S. sanctions on Iraq, and the U.S. funded killing of Palestinians, there are 35 wars currently being fought with our country involved in everyone of them. According to the United Nations, over 50,000 people die every day of starvation. Two billion people suffer in poverty and misery. The U.S. is 4.7% of the world's population and controls over 60% of the world's resources. The World Trade Towers fell on the poor of the world long ago. Their lives are not worth less than the lives of the World Trade Center victims.

We live in the midst of structured, systemic, institutionalization of

violence which kills people through war and poverty. From this global system comes as the litany of violence, from executions, sexism, racism, violence against children, violence against women, abortion, and the destruction of environment.

But on August 6, 1945, we crossed the line when our country vaporized 100,000 people in Hiroshima and another 40,000 people, 3 days later in Nagasaki. Today, we have some 20,000 nuclear weapons that we maintain with no movement toward dismantling them; instead, the government will increase our budget for killing to \$396 billion next year. The U.S. wants to send nuclear weapons into outer space and missile shields around the planet. Bush is willing to use nuclear weapons against seven nations, he says, but the Pentagon would use them anywhere, any day, any time.

We have a military economy that supports the handful of corporate billionaires and powerful generals and it needs war, enemies, victims, fear and indifference. We are addicted to violence, war, and death, as the normal, legal, legitimate way of resolving problems. This is the world you are forming deacons to minister in, a world addicted to violence, war and death.

#### 4. A Spirituality of Violence

In this culture of violence, we all practice a spirituality of violence, a spirituality of war, a spirituality of empire.

In a spirituality of violence, the President is welcomed to the National Cathedral on September 14th, with the Joint Chiefs sitting in the front row, and calls down a blessing from the gods of war on our revenge and bombing of human beings in Afghanistan.

In a spirituality of violence, the church models itself on the empire, sets up leaders who dominate and lord it over others, rejects the Sermon on the Mount as impractical, outlines a just war theory, and prefers the comforts of the culture of violence rather than the scary challenge of Gospel nonviolence, the risk of the cross and the resurrection.

In a spirituality of violence, the U.S. bishops met last November and voted unanimously, except for 4 bishops out of over 300, to bless and support the bombing and mass murder of the people in Afghanistan. We know over 4000 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the first two months of the war. Talk about child abuse!

Last November, during the Bishops meeting, they held a big public mass at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and the Joints Chiefs and Pentagon officials sat in the front row and one of the admirals read the first reading from Isaiah, a call to peace and justice, and then the bishop president read from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, "You have heard, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but I say to you, do not even get angry with anyone." The bishop closed the Gospel, and launched into a sermon endorsing the murder of children in Afghanistan, all in God's name, all in the name of the nonviolent Jesus.

This is the spirituality of the world, the pirituality of violence that we are all caught up in, all of us, beginning with the church, which supports the ultimate sin of mass murder, the sin of war.

5. Into this culture of violence comes the nonviolent Jesus

Mahatma Gandhi once said that Jesus was the most active practitioner of nonviolence in the history of the world, and the only people who don't know Jesus was nonviolent are Christians.

The only thing we can say for sure about Jesus is that he practiced radical, active, public, creative nonviolence. He called us to love everyone, including our neighbors and our enemies; to practice compassion toward everyone at home and abroad; to seek justice for the poor; to forgive everyone; to put down the sword; to take up the cross in the struggle for justice and peace; to lay down our lives, to risk our lives if necessary, in love for all humanity.

The whole Gospel is a clarion call to make peace, seek justice, and practice nonviolence. Jesus turns over the tables of systemic injustice, rejects violence, announces God's reign of peace and justice, proclaims the way of nonviolence and calls everyone of us to follow him on the road to peace and justice. The center of Jesus' teachings is the Sermon on the Mount, with its great commandment to love our enemies:

"You have heard how it was said, 'Love your neighbors and hate your enemies.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly God, for God makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, be

compassionate, just as your heavenly God is perfect and compassionate." (Mt. 5:43-48)

This call to love our enemies and be as compassionate as God is the heart of Jesus' teachings. This is what we are to practice and preach for the rest of our lives. This is what you are forming deacons to do, what they are to form Catholics to do, to love our country's enemies and to be as compassionate as God. This is what Jesus did all his life. He organized the poor and walked from Galilee to Jerusalem on a campaign of active nonviolence right into the Temple, the symbol of imperial and religious oppression of the poor, the center of systemic injustice, and in an act of peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience, turned over the tables of the moneychangers. "From now on, we are going to be contemplatives," he said, "This is a house of prayer." For this, he was arrested, tried, tortured, and executed, a victim of the death penalty. His last words to the community, to the church, as the soldiers dragged him away, could not be clearer or more to the point: "Put down the sword." He died on the cross saying, "The violence stops here in my body, which is given for you. You are forgiven, but from now on, you are not allowed to kill." He dies faithful to God and to the mission of seeking justice and welcoming God's reign of peace. And God raises him from the dead, and he sends us forth as witnesses and prophets and apostles of nonviolence and justice. We are supposed to proclaim God's reign of justice and peace, denounce the anti-reign of injustice and war, and walk from our own Galilees to Jerusalems on the road to peace, risking the cross, practicing nonviolence. In other words, Jesus teaches us not how to kill or oppress or lord it over others or to dominate or to hurt people, but how to live, how to love, how to serve, how to pray, and how to die, how to give our lives in the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace.

6. The problem is: If the world does not reverse this downward spiral of violence, we will destroy ourselves and the planet. The night before he was killed, Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "The choice is no longer violence or nonviolence. It's nonviolence or nonexistence."

7. If we want to follow Jesus, our task is to become people of nonviolence, to teach one another Jesus' way of nonviolence and to transform the church into a community of nonviolence.

The basic journey most church workers undergo begins with the movement from charity, where we serve the poor, to

justice, where we ask why the poor are suffering, realize how deep is the systemic injustice, and start working change the systems which oppress the poor and keep them poor. But once we start working for justice, we start to ask where is all the world's money and resources going, and we realize that the billions of dollars that could end hunger and poverty in one week are spent on war and weapons of mass destruction. Once we make the connection between injustice, poverty and starvation and militarism and war, we start to work for disarmament. But once we start working for disarmament, we begin to wonder what the world ncould be like, how we are meant to live, and what the way out of madness is, and we turn like Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. King to nonviolence. We hear Jesus call us to love our enemies and we begin the journey down the road of Gospel nonviolence.

At the heart of Gospel nonviolence is the vision of the beloved community, the reign of God, the truth that all life is sacred, that we are all equal sisters and brothers, all children of the God of peace, already reconciled, all one, all already united, and so from now on, we could never hurt or kill another human being, much less remain silent while our country wages war, builds nuclear weapons, or allows anyone to starve. So nonviolence is much more than a tactic or a strategy; it is a way of life. It is not passivity but active love and truth that seeks justice and peace for the whole human race, that resists systemic evil, that persistently reconciles everyone, but always renounces violence and killing and war no matter what. The nonviolent Jesus insists that there is no cause however noble for which we support the killing of any human being; and instead of killing others, we are willing to undergo being killed; instead of inflicting violence on others, we accept and undergo suffering without even the desire to retaliate or seek revenge; instead of crucifying people, we are willing to be crucified. The world says there are two options in the face of violence: you can fight back or run away. Jesus gives us a third option: creative, active nonviolent resistance to injustice. We stand up and resist evil and war publicly, through creative nonviolent love, trusting in the God of peace. Nonviolence begins in our hearts, where we renounce all the violence inside ourselves, and then moves out with active nonviolence to our families, communities, church, city, nation and world. When organized on a large level, active nonviolence can transform nations and the world, as Gandhi demonstrated in India's revolution, King with the civil rights movement,

the People Power movement showed in the Philippines, and Archbishop Tutu and the church movement demonstrated against apartheid. Study the history and practice of nonviolence, and you will see the power of nonviolence. Each one of us has to undertake this inner and public journey of Gospel nonviolence.

#### 8. My Experience after September 11, 2001.

I live in New York City, and after the horrific events of September 11th, 2001, I started volunteering like thousands of other New Yorkers. I worked at the Family Assistance Center as coordinator of the Red Cross chaplains, supervising some 500 chaplains of all religions. I personally met with over 1500 relatives who lost loved ones and escorted hundreds of relatives to Ground Zero, and also consoled hundreds of rescue workers at Ground Zero during the two months immediately afterwards. Needless to say, it was overwhelming and heartbreaking.

Once, about a month after the attacks, I stood at the ruins of the Second tower with a group of grieving relatives and one Catholic mother who lost her thirty year old son turned to me and said, "John, I have no room for anger. I feel only compassion for the families of the hijackers and the people of Afghanistan. Bombing Afghanistan will never heal my grief or bring my son back or protect us from further terrorist attacks. It will only increase my grief." I thought her compassion is a model for us all. That is the attitude of the Christian, of the follower of the nonviolent Jesus--compassion toward everyone.

While I was working with the grieving relatives, I was also speaking out against war and organizing anti-war vigils and marches. On Dr. King's birthday, 47 of us blocked the entrance to the U.S. mission to the United Nations, calling for an end to the U.S. bombings. We were arrested and jailed overnight. On Good Friday, 13 of us were arrested for blocking the entrance to the U.S.S. Intrepid, a war museum along the Hudson River. On April 20th, 100,000 of us marched for peace in Washington, D.C.

I'm trying to practice Jesus' way of compassion toward everyone, at home and abroad; to love my neighbors and love my enemies at the same time, to walk the road to peace and justice, no matter what. I think this is our primary task as church workers, to teach the Gospel by first of all trying to live it in our own lives.

#### 9. Jesus is trying to teach us that violence doesn't work.

The Gospel insists that violence is not just immoral and illegal, it's just downright impractical. Violence in response to violence always leads to further violence. As Gandhi said, an eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind. As Jesus said, "Those who live by the sword, will die by the sword. Those who live by the bomb, the gun, the nuclear weapons, will die by bombs and guns and nuclear weapons." State-sanctioned terrorism in response to terrorism will only lead to further terrorism. Revenge and retaliation only escalate violence and terrorism.

War can not and will not stop terrorism. War is terrorism. War is not the answer. War will never solve our problems. War never ends wars. War only sows the seeds for future wars. War can never lead to lasting peace or true security or a better world. War is not the way to become more human, or overcome evil or deepen our spiritual lives.

War is not the will of God. War is never blessed by God. War is not endorsed by any religion. War is the very definition of mortal sin. War is not the way to follow the nonviolent Jesus and walk the road to peace.

In other words: There is no such thing as a just war.

As Bishop Dingman said, "The just war theory should be filed away in the same drawer as the flat earth theory." It has nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus and we need to confess that and start teaching Jesus' way of nonviolence instead. Peaceful means are the only way to a peaceful future and the God of peace.

10. So what is our response to September 11th ?

We need to come to September 11th and the tragedies of the world from the perspective of Jesus and Gospel nonviolence, and so to speak out against war and all killings, and question what our country is doing.

Most people in New York City realize that bombing Afghanistan is not going to protect us from terrorism, but is in fact turning millions more people around the world against us, almost guaranteeing further terrorist attacks.

We as church people, as followers of the nonviolent Jesus, need to ask the hard question, the question that our government forbids us to ask: Why did September 11th happen? What have we done to the world that could cause some people to turn to suicidal terrorism?

Once you scratch the surface, you see the horrors our government's terrorism inflicts on humanity. Since 1990, our sanctions on Iraq have killed over 1 million Iraqis, most of them children, according to the United Nations,

UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the Vatican. We grieve the deaths of 2900 people in New York; they are beside themselves with the death of over one million Iraqis. I have been to Iraq, in an effort to love my enemies, and held the dying children. No one supports Saddam or tyranny anywhere, but our country is the reason why these children have been killed, why they continue to die quietly by the thousands each month. If we want to stop terrorist attacks against us, we must immediately lift the unjust sanctions on Iraq, and you and I must say so publicly in our churches, whether people want to hear it or not.

We must call for an immediate end to all U.S. military aid to Israel; to stop funding the occupation of the Palestinians; to stop supporting Israeli war criminals; and to start supporting nonviolent Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers. We must demand our country stop bombing Colombia and the Philippines; close our own terrorist training camps, like the School of the Americas, as well as the CIA, NSA, and the Pentagon; and lift the entire third world debt.

We must call for dramatic cuts in our military budget; an immediate end to the Star Wars missile shield program; and the abolition of every nuclear weapon and weapon of mass destruction. We must demand that our country undertake international treaties for nuclear disarmament; join the world court and international law; and then, redirect those billions of dollars toward the hard work for a lasting peace through international cooperation for nonviolent alternatives; to feed every starving child and refugee on the planet, end poverty, show compassion to everyone and protect the earth itself.

Our goal politically should be as the Bible says, to overcome evil with good, to win the world over with nonviolent love. Then we can begin with the real task on hand, as Thomas Merton wrote shortly before he died, the task of abolishing war itself, and converting our culture of violence into a culture of nonviolence.

I'm saying that our country must change everything and engage in pro-active, pro-human, nonviolent, non-military, creative peacemaking actions for the whole world; that we can't fight terrorism by becoming terrorists and using terrorist methods. As deacons, diaconate directors and church workers, we must proclaim this vision of nonviolence in the name of Jesus for the rest of our lives, and help form and create a church that walks the road to peace and justice.

11. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more"

The prophet Isaiah says that someday, the nations of the world will climb the mountain of God, where they will be instructed by the God of peace, and then they will go down the mountain and immediately dismantle their weapons and study war no more.

On December 7th, 1993, with Philip Berrigan and two friends, I walked onto the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, right through the middle of wargames, and invoking the biblical commandments to beat swords into plowshares and love our enemies, hammered twice on an F-15 nuclear-capable fighter bomber in a "Plowshares disarmament action." As the soldiers surrounded us, I said on behalf of the group, "We are unarmed, peaceful people; we mean you no harm; we're just here to dismantle this weapon of death."

For that action I faced twenty years in prison. I was found guilty of two felony counts, destruction of government property and conspiracy to commit a felony crime. I am a full-fledged felon, an ex-con. I spent eight months in a tiny jail cell and never left it except for the few days we went to court. It was a powerful experience of God, from the action to our imprisonment to the trials. Jail was terrible, but also a great blessing. Everyday, we studied the scriptures, broke bread and passed the cup. It was as if Jesus himself was present in our cell with us. We were quickly found guilty, and I was released and sentenced to house arrest for 9 months. I'm learning the old lesson from the abolitionist movements, the suffragettes and women's movement, the labor and civil rights movements, and the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements, that positive, nonviolent social change comes about through risk and sacrifice; when good people break bad laws which legalize injustice and war and accept the consequences; when we accept suffering without retaliating as we insist on the truth of justice and peace with love; that peace and justice comes about, in the end, through our participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus, through our sharing in the cross and resurrection. That is how we make peace and seek justice, by following Jesus to the cross, and risking ourselves publicly in the proclamation of the Gospel vision against war and injustice. Everyone of us has to take up the cross of nonviolent resistance against systemic injustice and violence, if we want to follow Jesus and be authentic Christians.

12. Each one of you has a critical role to help rebuild the church, to make it a church of peace and justice.

We are all heartbroken and appalled these days by the scandals, the fact that children have been hurt and hurt by priests, and we have to apologize for this atrocious behavior, and make sure it never happens again, that not one child is ever hurt again, and that means we have to help change the church, to move it from power, domination, secrecy and sexism to the community of peace and nonviolence that Jesus wants it to be, which means, we ourselves have to become faithful practitioners of peace, justice and nonviolence.

We need to call not just for an end to domination, power, secrecy and sexism in the church; and of course, not just for the ordination of married people and women and the inclusion of everyone; but for the complete rejection of the so-called just war theory and the church's full embrace of Gospel nonviolence, so that the church will become what Jesus wants it to be, his community of active, loving nonviolence in the world.

I think in the end, only the churches, the synagogues and the mosques, the communities of faith, can save us from the brink of global destruction. We are the only ones with the vision to see the humanity in the eyes of our enemies, the ones who will defend the poor and oppressed and our enemies, the ones who will give our lives for them, but that means that each one of us has to give our lives as deacons, directors and church workers to following the nonviolent Jesus on the road to peace and justice; to teach the vision of Gospel nonviolence and to help create a new church of peace, justice and nonviolence. If we can do this, we will receive a church of peace as a gift from the God of peace.

13. A few concluding encouragements:

1. Form Prophets of Peace, Justice and Nonviolence

From now on, all of us must speak out for peace and justice, and in every sermon and talk we give, speak out publicly against war, nuclear weapons and injustice. Please ask your deacons and priests to speak out against war and nuclear weapons. Teach them how to do it. People will get upset at them, but they are the leaders of the church, which means, their task is to uphold the biblical vision of peace, justice and nonviolence. You will say that you are too busy forming good pastors, but I say that your deacons

and priests must not only be good pastors, they must, from now on, because of the state of the world, become prophets of peace and justice, like Ellacuria, people who denounce war and announce God's reign of peace. Please form new prophets of peace, justice and nonviolence for our church.

Think of Jesus giving his first public sermon in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, according to chapter four of Luke. He could have said anything he wanted to, but he opened the book of the prophet Isaiah and said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to preach good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives, to announce the year of jubilee, when all the land will be redistributed equally."

What is their response? They denounce him, chase him out of the sanctuary, and try to throw him off a cliff. This is the guy we follow! Each one of us must announce good news of justice for the poor, the good news of peace and disarmament, and risk being thrown off the cliff by our parishes, priests, and bishops. Each one of us must risk being faithful to the nonviolent Jesus in this culture of violence.

2. Please invite your deacons and parishes to get involved in the peace movement, to join Pax Christi, to support local grassroots campaigns for peace and justice.

Each one of us has to get involved in the peace and justice movement. We don't have to do everything, but we all have to do something. Pick one or two issues, like nuclear disarmament, the abolition of the death penalty, or the lifting of the sanctions on Iraq, and get involved in it, and teach your deacons to get involved in it, and teach your parishioners to be involved in it.

I asked Cesar Chavez shortly before he died, how we Catholics should work for peace and justice. He said, "Public action, public action, public action! Tell everyone they have to act publicly for peace and justice for the rest of their lives." So I say the same thing to you: Get involved with your local peace and justice groups in their public actions for peace, and teach your deacons to do that. They need you. No one will ever tell your

deacons to support the peace and justice movement. But if you want to form prophets of peace and justice, you have to get your deacons to go and help these peace and justice groups, to serve them, befriend them, let them into their parishes, and let their churches become centers for peace and justice.

3. Teach Nonviolence to your deacons, churches and families.

Study nonviolence, teach it, discuss it, and practice it. Help your deacons, your families, your churches and yourselves to be nonviolent to yourself, your spouses, children, families, to your parishioners and church, to your cities, the nation and the world. Help one another to love the enemies of the United States. How are you loving our enemies right now? The U.S. has declared war against the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Colombia and many other places. How are we loving those people? How are you helping your deacons to publicly love our enemies? Are you teaching them to get their parishes to love our enemies?

Each one of us has to do this, to help others do this. The church has failed to teach nonviolence and love its enemies, but nonetheless, the Gospel of Jesus still insists that this is the task before us. This is our calling, to be the people who love their enemies, people of nonviolence.

4. Help your deacons to be activists for peace and justice, but also contemplatives of peace too.

To follow Jesus on the road to peace and justice, we also need to pray and meditate daily. For me, prayer means sitting with God who loves each one of us unconditionally and taking time with that intimate relationship with the God of peace. As I sit with the God of peace, God disarms my heart of the violence and wars within me and uses me as an instrument of God's disarming love. Through prayer, we are disarmed and become people of nonviolence.

Please form deacons who are people of prayer, people of contemplative nonviolence, who allow God to disarm them of their violence. Keep allowing God to disarm your own hearts, to get rid of our own inner violence and resentments; to grant clemency and forgiveness to everyone who ever hurt us, help us all move from anger and and revenge and violence to nonviolence and compassion for everyone; so that we become people who radiate personally the peace we seek politically. The only way to become people of peace and nonviolence is through a deepening spiritual experience with God, through regular contemplative prayer.

5. Form deacons who stay close to the poor.

The poor and disenfranchized are the ones who can teach us about God and Jesus and justice and nonviolence.

Please form deacons who love the poor and serve them, befriend them, and most of all, like Jesus, defend them. Then, in the process, we will, like Christ, become one with them, and suffer and die with them. The reign of God belongs to the poor, according to the Beatitudes; perhaps if we walk with them, practice downward mobility and become one with them, they may share it with us.

6. Help your deacons and parishes not to be afraid to work for peace and justice.

Jesus says over and over, Do not be afraid. Perhaps the main reason why no one wants to speak out against our country's wars and nuclear weapons, is because we are afraid that we will get in trouble with our bishops and priests, our families and friends and communities. We fear that people will get mad at us. But Jesus calls us to follow him on the road to peace and justice, to speak out for God's reign of nonviolence and justice, and not to fear anyone or anything, whether the loss of our reputation, or getting arrested or even killed.

The Gospel teaches us that death does not get the last word. Our survival is already guaranteed. We belong to Christ. We believe in God. What do we have to lose? Let's put aside our fears and help one another not to live in fear, and to take another step forward on the road to peace. We cannot practice nonviolence or follow Jesus if we are afraid. Please form deacons not to live in fear. If God has called them to serve as church workers, then they must trust God and speak out, and God will take care of them, even in the midst of controversy and crises.

7. As we walk the road to peace, help one another reflect on our image of God.

This is the heart of Jesuit spirituality, of Ignatian contemplation. What is our image of God? Where is God in the struggle for justice and peace? Who is the God we worship? How do your deacons imagine God?

As you work for peace and justice, you learn, contrary to what the Pentagon and the warmaking culture says, that our God is not a god of war, but the God of peace; not a god of injustice, but the God of justice; not a god of vengeance and retaliation, but the God of compassion and mercy; not a god of violence, but the God of nonviolence; not a god of death, but the living God of life.

When Jesus called us to love our enemies, he said we should do this because God does this. God let's the sun shine on the just and the unjust, and the rain fall on the

good and the bad. God is compassionate to every human being on earth, and we should do the same and be like God.

If we can begin to imagine the peace and nonviolence of God; to worship the God of peace and nonviolence; if we can help our deacons and our people and our church to imagine and worship the God of peace and nonviolence; then in the process we will refuse to support war and become people of peace and nonviolence.

My question is: Is your God nonviolent? Do you worship the God of peace? Can you imagine the compassion and nonviolence of God toward every human being on the planet? Can you witness to the God of peace?

Please form deacons and church workers who worship the living God of peace and nonviolence. Teach them to help our parishes worship the God of peace and nonviolence. Then, maybe, finally, our church will become the church of peace and nonviolence we are called to be.

Thank you for all you do for the church. Keep on following the nonviolent Jesus, come what may. Keep walking the road to peace. Keep preaching the good news of peace. Keep worshiping the God of peace. Keep welcoming God's reign of peace. Keep forming a new church of peace and justice. Keep becoming true apostles and prophets and deacons of peace and justice, true disciples of the nonviolent Jesus. God bless you.