

Called to Unite

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So many wise yet paradoxical words in the readings for the [4th Sunday of Ordinary Time](#)!

I was speaking about this gospel with a group of high school juniors a few weeks ago and we took time to break down what the word blessed (beatitude) means. How can Jesus say: "Happy are those who mourn"? How can St. Paul tell us that God chooses the weak and lowly? How can the Psalmist praise the Lord and insist that God secures justice for the oppressed?



When we look around our own neighborhoods and around the world, we see oppression, hunger, poverty, violence and those most affected by these terrible things are the "weak" and the "lowly". There are seemingly many reasons to mourn and to be unhappy! Yet, these readings speak of happiness and joy and promise that the Lord shall reign and bring happiness to those most in need.

We can be tempted to hear in the Beatitudes the promise of reward "in heaven" and to leave these promises in the Lord's hands, but I think we must read the Beatitudes in their entirety and take into account the words of the Prophet Zephaniah: "I will leave in your midst a people who are humble and lowly" in concert with the words of Jesus specifically naming "those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness."

Those who hunger and thirst for justice may be only a remnant, but they know that justice is possible and is the will of God. We are called to be part of that remnant that is filled with those who are poor and weak and who seek righteousness. We are in this together: the meek, the mourning, the captives, and the hungry, alongside those who observe the law of God and seek justice.

It is because of those who seek justice and obey the law in righteousness that the hungry will be fed and captives will be released. The Psalmist can shout joy to the Lord because he knows that those who follow God's law must care for those in need.

We must see these readings as a whole; they must have integrity and they must inspire us to have solidarity. Weakness and poverty, injustice and captivity, these things separate and divide. But, if we love the law of God and we thirst for righteousness, then we must feel compelled to live the law and bring happiness to our brothers and sisters. We can find our happiness when we seek to bring happiness to those who are cast down by systems of injustice. We do not have to wait to be "in heaven."

In hearing these words we are called to be paradox; we are called to unite the thirst for righteousness and justice with the needs of those who suffer and struggle. We are called to bring forth the reign of God by risking persecution and anger for the sake of righteousness and justice.

Tobias Harkleroad

FAN Director of Campaigns

Suggested Action:

What can you do this week to show your awareness of the need for justice and your willingness to help meet the needs of the suffering? Look at the suggestions in this newsletter for actions to address our sisters and brothers affected by climate/environmental disasters, human trafficking, or gun violence.

Suggested Petitions:

For the courage and fortitude to follow the Beatitudes and seek justice and humility. We pray...
For all those who are persecuted for any reason; may they stay strong in the promises of God.
We pray...

Prayer:

May our prayer echo the words of Scripture:

God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the lowly, and the despised.

May I keep faith in the Lord forever.

May I seek him with the humble and weak of the earth.

May I seek justice through God's holy law.

Rejoice and be glad for we are called to see and be paradox in the world through our hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Rejoice and be glad for we can be blessing, hope, and happiness for those who are poor, those who suffer, the downcast, and those who mourn.

The Lord shall reign for generations because we hear and respond to his holy commandments!

Amen

Screening of 'The Letter' Film

Last week FAN hosted a screening of [The Letter](#), a film co-produced by the Laudato Si' Movement, which tells the story of a journey to Rome of frontline leaders to discuss the encyclical letter Laudato Si' with Pope Francis. After the film we offered participants the chance to engage with one another in small group discussion about



how the film made them feel and what images and phrases struck them while watching. We offered opportunities for advocacy on a national level and invited everyone to host their own screenings in their communities.

Click here for more information about [hosting a screening of The Letter](#).

DC Actions FAN Took Part In

Last week, the staff of FAN participated in two actions in Washington, D.C. for social justice.

The first was the [Peace Rally and Parade](#) held on January 16th and coordinated annually by the Coalition for Peace in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. We walked with members of the DC area's Poor People's Campaign. (Pictured, top) Find some great photos of the parade by [clicking here](#).

The second event was the annual March for Life held on Friday, January 20th. Marching under our banner urging a consistent ethic of life, the staff engaged in conversations and advocacy with many visitors. (Pictured, bottom)



'Cease and Desist' Letter Sent to Fossil Fuel Company CEOs

Greta Thunberg is a name you may have heard before but do you know Vanessa Nakate, Helena Gualinga and Luisa Neubauer? These four women climate activists [wrote a 'Cease and Desist' letter](#) to oil and gas CEOs and personally delivered it at last week's World Economic Forum meeting in Switzerland, the theme of which was "Cooperation in a Fragmented World."

The open letter demands that CEOs halt all new oil, gas and coal projects, and "stop blocking the clean energy transition we all so urgently need." Nearly 1 million people have signed on. Sign your name on by [clicking here](#).



Save the Date: Gun Violence Survivors Week Feb. 1-7

February 1–7, 2023 is the fifth annual National Gun Violence Survivors Week to take stock of the terrible human toll of America's gun violence crisis. Listed below are some ways to engage and take action.



1. Everytown will be hosting three virtual community conversations on Zoom. Find more information on each and register by [clicking here](#).
2. Have you been personally impacted by gun violence? Consider sharing your unique lived experience in your own words by [submitting your story here](#).
3. Share facts and information about National Gun Violence Survivors Week on social media using the hashtag #GVSurvivorsWeek.

On February 14th, 2023, FAN will cosponsor a [commemoration](#) of the lives lost during the Parkland, FL shooting in 2018. If you live in the DC area, we invite you to join us and Team ENOUGH, [Brady's](#) youth-led and youth-serving program, at Trinity Washington University from 6:30pm - 8:00pm.

Webinar-St. Josephine Bakhita: A Saint for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) is hosting a webinar to honor the Feast Day of St. Josephine Bakhita.

The event will take place via Zoom on **February 7th at 2pm Eastern (11am Pacific)**. Participants will have the opportunity to learn more about human trafficking, including policy issues, trends, and awareness. [Click here to register to attend](#).



Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

Last week, some members of the greater Richmond, VA area Franciscan Justice Circle took the opportunity for local peace-related in person advocacy related to gun violence prevention with Moms Demand Action at the beginning of the state General Assembly's annual regular legislative session that will last for 30 days.

Attendees met their lawmakers and engaged with them about their priorities such as secure firearm storage, banning untraceable "ghost guns," and other gun safety initiatives, raising the importance of protecting life and preventing violence in their communities.



If you would like more information about joining a Justice Circle near you or forming one in your community, [please contact us](#).