

Pray for those who persecute you

Image by [Ulrike Mai](#) from [Pixabay](#)

In the readings this week for the [7th Sunday in Ordinary Time](#), Jesus quotes the ancient law: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” We know what that law meant: when someone takes something from you, you are to take the same thing from him or her. This law of retaliation was actually a sign of progress, since it prevented excessive retaliation. If someone harmed you, then you could repay him or her to the same degree; you could not do something worse. Ending the matter there, in a fair exchange, was a step forward.



But Jesus goes beyond this: “But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil.” When I hear this, I find myself resisting and saying; but why Lord? If someone thinks badly of me, if someone hurts me, why can I not repay him or her with the same currency? But Jesus says “No, nonviolence. No act of violence.”

We might think that Jesus’ teaching is a part of a plan; in the end, the wicked will desist. But Jesus explains that is not why he asks us to love even those who do us harm. What, then, is the reason? It is that the Father, our God, continues to love everyone, even when his love is not reciprocated. God “makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” In the first reading, he tells us: “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” In other words: “Live like me, seek the things that I seek.” And that is precisely what Jesus did. He did not point a finger at those who wrongfully condemned him and put him to a cruel death, but opened his arms to them on the cross. And he forgave those who drove the nails into his wrists.

If we want to be disciples of Christ in this world, difficult as it is, if we want to call ourselves Christians and not in name only, love is the only way; there is no other.

Having been loved by God, we are called to love in return. Having been forgiven, we are called to forgive. Having been touched by love, we are called to love without waiting for others to love first. Having been saved graciously, we are called to seek no benefit from the good we do and we are invited to not stoop down to the level of those who offend us.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This is another Christian difference, a Christian innovation if you will, in the words of Jesus. Again, I ask myself: Is it really possible to forgive and even love our enemies in a world torn by war and terror, religious and ethnic prejudice, economic disparity and exploitation of the weak, not to mention the political divide we find ourselves witnessing and living with?

Jesus, with his limitless love, raises the bar of our humanity. In the end, we can ask ourselves: “Will we be able to make it? Let us tell ourselves that if the goal were impossible, the Lord would not have asked us to strive for it. By our own effort, it is difficult to achieve, but St. Paul tells us:

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” We need to cling to this truth because the measure of Jesus is love without measure. His commandment of love is not simply a challenge; it is the heart of the gospel.

We have a lot to ponder as we prepare ourselves in a few days to live once more the blessed time of Lent. What kind of conversion can we ask for? Maybe as we reflect and make resolutions we can look at the final verse in this week’s readings as our key, “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew uses the Greek word “telos” which is probably better translated as “complete.” We are not to be perfect as in doing everything correctly, that is, as in being absolutely morally correct. We are to be perfect as in striving to reach the completeness we are called to in the Kingdom of God. Attempting to love our enemies is part of striving for that completeness.

Sr. Maria Orlandini, OSF
FAN Director of Advocacy

Suggested Action:

Is there a person or persons that you could reach out to in love?

Call your Representatives/Senators and invite them to be open to reach out to the other side of the political aisle in their work.

Suggested Petition:

In our work of advocacy, we cannot allow ourselves to see the other as an enemy no matter our society’s influence. Let us pray that we may be able to heed the words of Jesus and let love guide our words and our actions.

Prayer from St. Eusebius:

**May I be no one’s enemy,
and may I be the friend
of that which is eternal and abides.
May I never quarrel with those nearest me,
and if I do, may I be reconciled quickly.
May I never devise evil against another.
If any devise evil against me,
may I escape uninjured and without inflicting harm.
May I love, seek, and attain only that which is good.**

Amen.

Tomorrow: Take Action on Gun Violence Prevention

February 14th, Valentine’s Day is typically a day when red hearts and messages of love are spread throughout schools across our country, but five years ago on that day, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School in Parkland, Florida instead endured the terror of a mass shooting.

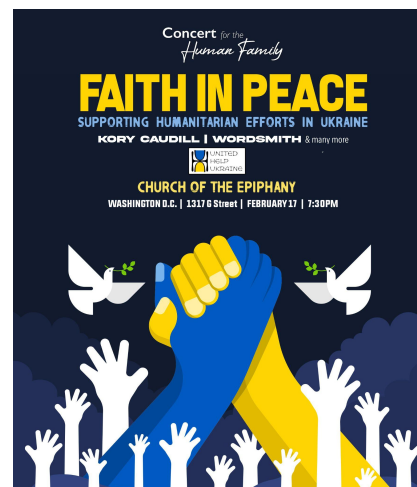


For anyone who lives in the DC metro area, we invite you to join Franciscan Action Network **in person** tomorrow **Tuesday, February 14, 6:30-8 pm** at **Trinity Washington University** for a special event to [Remember Parkland](#), a commemoration of the lives lost that day. FAN is a cosponsor of this important event. [RSVP to attend here](#).

For those outside of the DC area, please take action and [demand a ban on assault weapons](#).

Friday: Concert in Support of Ukraine

If you live in the DC metro area, please join Franciscan Action Network and other faith sponsors for [Faith in Peace](#), a concert in support of humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, **this Friday, February 17 at 7:30pm** at the Church of the Epiphany (1317 G Street NW). Part of the "Concert for the Human Family" series sponsored by the Episcopal Church, this concert will draw on faith traditions with a common love of peace at home and abroad. Proceeds will benefit [United Help Ukraine](#), a non-profit organization that provides medical kits, generators, and other badly-needed humanitarian supplies in Ukraine. Even if you can't make the concert, you may [donate here](#).



Music will include Pop/Rock, Hip-Hop, Instrumental and Country traditions. Anthony "Wordsmith" Parker, a Baltimore artist who provided prayerful songs at our recent "[Faith in Democracy](#)" vigil, will be featured. [Order your ticket today by clicking here](#).

Save the Date: "Seeking Asylum" Film Launch

Mark your calendars for **February 21 from 7-9pm EST (4-6pm PT)** and join the Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC), of which FAN is a member, for an exclusive virtual screening of the new documentary film [Seeking Asylum](#), followed by a panel discussion with leading asylum experts and the film's creators.



Created by [Honeypot Productions](#), *Seeking Asylum* bears witness to the endless deterrents migrants face when petitioning for asylum in the U.S. In a time of increased attacks on the rights and humanity of asylum seekers, this film powerfully follows one woman's journey as she searches for safety for herself and her children. [Reserve your spot here](#).

Support Friars in Syria Aiding Earthquake Victims

While Syria has been in constant crisis during years of revolution and war, the friars from the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land have remained with the people, including in the city of Aleppo. After the recent massive earthquakes in



the area, the friars continue doing God's work at no small risk to their own lives, providing direct aid to families of all faiths who need shelter, food, water, and medicine.

Gifts made to the [Syrian Relief Fund](#) established by the friars will give shelter, meals, medical care and support during the long process of rebuilding and recovery. Please consider supporting the fund.

Farm Bill and Sign on Letter

The Farm Bill is a package of legislation passed once every five years that has a tremendous impact on food production and distribution in the U.S. Covering programs for farmers, food access for low-income families, and environmental protections for natural resources such as soil and water, the Farm Bill sets the stage for how U.S. food and farm systems work.



The current draft of the Farm Bill includes a ban on SNAP (food stamps) for people who have been convicted of a drug felony offense. FAN has signed on to [this letter](#) to Congress urging lawmakers to repeal the drug felony ban in this year's Farm Bill, as previously incarcerated people are often in need of assistance. To sign your organization onto this letter, please use [this form](#). **The deadline to sign is COB Thursday, February 16th.**

Additionally, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is asking for endorsements of their platform which calls for racial equity across the food system, a climate-resilient future, and investments in healthy rural and urban communities. [Read the platform and endorse by clicking here.](#)

Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

[Image courtesy of St. John – St. Paul Catholic Collaborative](#)

The **Connecticut-Rhode Island Franciscan Justice Circle** invites anyone in the region to join them as they begin a study of Laudato Si' to enrich the process of discerning actions to protect our common home and those especially vulnerable to its destruction. Sessions will begin on **Thursday, Feb. 23 at 7pm** over zoom and the Circle welcomes others in the region to join! Please [contact](#) FAN to get the link.



If you are interested in advocating for a **new bill that aims to drastically cut climate pollution by 2030**, you are welcome to join members of the NYC-area FJC and a larger group of people of faith who are organizing nationally around the Earth Bill ([summary here](#)) on **Wed. Feb. 15 at 12pm ET/ 9am PT**. This is an early meeting to jump start the group's faith organizing, to learn about people's interest, and to get to know each other better. They will explore how to organize for action and impact, in urgency and emergency, with spirit and religious fervor, to stop the love of money from destroying Paradise, to protect the miracle of life on Earth, to manifest a miracle in Congress, to pass the Earth Bill. [Please register here.](#)