

Why, O Lord, do you let our hearts harden?

Hearing the reading from the prophet Isaiah for the [first Sunday in Advent](#) is particularly poignant this year in light of the war in the Holy Land: “You, Lord, are our father...Why do you let us wander, o Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?” Truly it seems that all parties have forgotten that they are all God’s children and that they must “fear” God by respecting His commandments. Certainly Hamas was not respecting the moderation called for in Islam when it carried out the brutal October 7 attack, nor has Israel respected the proportionality called for in the Hebrew scriptures in the mass slaughter of its response. And many Americans have chosen a side, refusing to see the full human suffering of the other side or even to believe the information released about the horrors of the violence being perpetrated.



As followers of Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis, we have a special gift and duty to bring light into this darkness. Perhaps Jesus’ most famous and difficult teaching was, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:43-45). Put that together with Jesus’ words in the gospel reading (Mk 13:33-37) for the first Sunday in Advent, “Be watchful! Be alert! May [the Lord] not come suddenly and find you sleeping!” What this tells me is that I must love—that is, care deeply about the welfare of—people who are different from me in every way: religion, language, culture, history, political outlook. I must care for the welfare of both Israelis and Palestinians, no matter how much I might disapprove of their actions. And I must not be found “sleeping,” that is, throwing up my hands and ignoring the situation as violence and suffering escalate.

St. Francis showed us well how not to be found “sleeping” in the face of violence. In 1225, Francis heard about contention between parties in Assisi, contention he knew from past experience could easily explode into bloodshed. It would have been easy for Francis, who was gravely ill and unable to travel into the city, to do nothing more than shake his head. But instead he exerted great effort: he composed a new verse of his Canticle specifically calling for forgiveness and reconciliation, promising that God would “crown” those who bore tribulation and endured in peace. Francis sent two friars to sing the new verse to the warring parties in Assisi, whose hard hearts were melted by the beauty of the song and who reconciled.

Francis also showed us how to be awake for the coming celebration of Christmas when he arranged the first live nativity 800 years ago, in which he tried to make the Incarnation real and immediate using tangible experience: the cold night air, the smell of the hay, the lowing of animals, the play of firelight on the walls of a cave. Can I be awake now to God’s living presence in the experience of my suffering brothers and sisters in the Holy Land: terrified as bombs fall,

wondering whether their separated loved ones are alive, shivering in tents after fleeing their homes, lacking the food and medical care they need to survive?

Can I learn from Jesus, who told me to keep loving both sides even—in fact, especially—when it is difficult to do so? Can I learn from Francis to keep speaking up with love, to use my creativity, even when I am physically unable to be there to help solve a problem? Can I keep awake through this Advent, looking for every opportunity to call for an immediate, continuing ceasefire and the pursuit of a just, durable peace?

It is so difficult to keep praying and taking loving action when we know that we ourselves as Americans have been guilty of terrible retribution, when “we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind” (Isaiah 15). Yet the prophet Isaiah reminds us that no problem—even the Israel/Palestine issue—is too large for God to resolve and that we are to be God’s instruments, because “we are the clay and you the potter; we are all the work of your hands.”

Michele Dunne OFS
FAN Executive Director

Suggested action:

Watch the [video of Pope Francis’ prayer for peace in the Holy Land](#). Prayerfully consider joining an advocacy action by FAN, Churches for Middle East Peace, or a local group that is bringing the moral voice of faith to call for an end to the violence.

Suggested petition:

For a change in the hearts of those in Israel, Palestine, and the U.S. government, away from rage and the desire for revenge, and towards a willingness to end violence and work towards a just solution reached by dialogue and diplomacy, we pray....

For a change in our own hearts, away from a belief that violence brings solutions and towards an ability to see every person as a beloved child of God deserving of peace and dignity, we pray.....

Advent Prayer (Adapted from Thomas of Celano, The Life of St. Francis, Ch 30)

**Lord Jesus, as we await the celebration of your birth,
we recall how Francis of Assisi reminded us of
the humility of the Incarnation,
how you took on the discomforts of our flesh
and gave yourself to us with supreme and indescribable love.**

**At Greccio as in Bethlehem,
simplicity was given a place of honor,
poverty was exalted, and
humility was commended.
May it be so in our lives, today and always.**

Amen.

Today is Giving Tuesday - Please remember FAN!

What a year this has been for our work together as the Franciscan Action Network (FAN). While our planet struggles with climate crises, the world's peoples suffer from wars, and our fellow citizens in the U.S. contend with economic and political challenges, we Franciscans remain faithful to our call to be messengers of God's love and joy and **we recognize and value your partnership** in this call. **We need to raise \$20,000 by the end of this year to accomplish everything we want to in 2024 and [we need your support](#).**

Please watch this [brief video](#) from Executive Director Michele Dunne asking for your support.



Today is Giving Tuesday, a critical day to meet our goal. Please [give today if you want FAN to be there in 2024!](#)

Join FAN for Advent Meditation Mondays

Advent can be a busy time of the year and fortunately there are many prayer resources we can draw upon. The staff of Franciscan Action Network invites you to a time of quiet reflection and meditation on the scripture for the first three weeks of Advent. FAN staff will lead the meditations and we will also offer a suggested advocacy action each week. This will be a time to feel united as we journey together toward Christmas.



We will meet virtually via Zoom from **12:30-1:00pm ET (9:30-10:00am PT)** on **Monday, December 4, 11 and 18**. [Register to attend by clicking here](#).

How Voter Suppression Works Today and What We Can Do About It

On **Thursday, December 7 from 7:00-8:30pm ET (4:00-5:30pm PT)** FAN is cosponsoring a [conversation](#) hosted by the Workers Circle and the Center for Common Ground on how voter suppression works today and how we can combat it.

New approaches to voter suppression are disenfranchising millions of voters of color, young people, and poor people. This 90-minute expert panel includes Andrea Miller, Founding Board Member and Executive Director of the Center for



Common Ground, Evan Milligan, lead plaintiff in *Allen v. Milligan* and Executive Director of the Alabama Forward, and Richard Walker, Founder and Executive Director of Bridging the Gap Virginia and Returning Citizen. There will be ample time for questions and answers. [Register here](#).

COP28 to Begin This Week

For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits called COPs, or Conference of Parties. Over that time, climate change has become a global priority. The upcoming COP28 will take place from November 30-December 12, 2023 at Expo City, Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. There are now 198 Parties (197 countries plus the European Union) represented at the COP. [Click here](#) to learn more about COP28.



Pope Francis will attend COP28 and will address the delegates on December 2.

Francis is the first Pope to attend a COP meeting. [Register](#) for a webinar this **Thursday, Nov 30, 2023 12pm ET (9am PT)**, sponsored by Catholic Climate Covenant and Laudato Si' Movement, on the impact Pope Francis could have when he addresses the delegates.

Monthly Anti-Trafficking Prayer Service

Recently, the USCCB created a special working group dedicated to Anti-Trafficking Education and Outreach. They will host a new monthly prayer service on the 8th of each month per the date of St. Josephine Bakhita's Feast Day in February. The mission is to bring awareness each month of the year to issues that intersect with human trafficking.

The next prayer service is **December 8 at 2pm ET (11am PT) on Zoom** when the prayer service will focus on experiences of migrants, refugees and asylees. Join the monthly prayer services at this recurring [St. Josephine Bakhita Prayer Service Zoom Link](#).

Additionally, the group has produced two resources: A [St. Josephine Prayer Card](#) and an [Anti-Trafficking Calendar for 2024](#).



Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

Have you been looking for ways to get further involved in local dialogue and advocacy with other Franciscan hearts in your area? Inspired by the charism of Saints Francis and Clare,

called to

"WALK THE TALK"

[Franciscan Justice Circles](#) are forming nationwide. Please [contact us](#) if you'd like to [learn more](#) about the Circles or connect to one near you.

Upcoming FJC meetings:

Cleveland-area FJC: Wed. Nov. 29 from 7:30-8:00pm EST on zoom

Virtual FJC: Thurs. Nov. 30 at 11:00am PST / 2:00pm EST on zoom

Connecticut-Rhode Island FJC: Thurs. Nov. 30 at 2:00pm EST on zoom

SoCal FJC: Thurs. Nov. 30 from at 6:00pm PST on zoom

Central Indiana FJC: Fri. Dec. 1 at 1:00pm EST on zoom

Mid-Hudson Valley FJC: Tues. Dec. 5 at 12:00pm EST on zoom

Kansas FJC: Wed. Dec. 5 at 7:00pm CST on zoom

DC-area FJC: Sat. Dec. 9 at 10:00am in person

Please [contact us](#) to get connected to any of these Franciscan Justice Circles.