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Reflection Date: March 24, 2024 - Palm Sunday

Hearing the Voice of Jesus

(Final reflection from Br. Paul Crawford, OFM Cap., 1952-2024)

In the [Passion of the Lord this Palm Sunday](#), it is easy to hear the people of Jerusalem as they greet the arrival of their expected king. But what was Jesus feeling? What was Jesus sensing? Was he as joyful as the crowd? Could Jesus have been wondering as He entered Jerusalem, “Do they still not understand where God is to be found?”

As we are surrounded by the crowd on Palm Sunday, what are we hearing? Are we distracted about the tight parking and seating because of the throng of faces? Were you able to get your regular seats? What is it we are thinking today? Is it something about how we are a little uncomfortable with our neighbors who need an ear to listen to them or how someone in need makes us nervous? There is a lot to think about today for us: the economy; the poor in the streets, the refugees, and the immigrants; keeping the peace throughout the world, in our society, and more importantly, in our hearts.



The scriptures tell us that throughout Jesus's life, he often went to a quiet place to pray. Jesus would definitely take time out of his ministry to continue in relationship with his Father. This relationship empowered Jesus to hear what was really going on with the beggar by the pool or with the woman caught in adultery and about to be stoned. It gave him the compassion and encouragement to say to the righteous crowd, “Whoever among you is without sin may cast the first stone,” and to the beggar by the pool, “Do you want to be healed?”

We are in an age where communicating with one another is going through a drastic revolution. We have Facebook, X, Instagram, and texting. We are easily distracted by the latest technology and the latest accessory that can make our life better than before. What is it that we need to let go of in order to hear the voice of Jesus Christ?

Once, as a story says, there was a sole survivor of a shipwreck who washed up on a small uninhabited island. He prayed daily for God to rescue him and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements. Then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived back to his hut to find it in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened and everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. He cried and asked, “God, how could you do this to me?” Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island, coming to rescue him. The man asked the captain and crew, “How did you know where I was?” They replied, “We saw the smoke signal.”

In our relationship with Jesus, no matter how things turn out, we have a relationship that lasts. That relationship is strengthened by taking time to pray and to help the poor, the needy, and our neighbor.

It is easy to become discouraged when we hold onto what was instead of what might be. God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Remember this the next time your heart is burning to the ground. It just may be a smoke signal that summons God's grace.

Br. Paul Crawford, OFM, Cap., MSW

Br. Paul served as President of FAN until his passing in February 2024

Suggested Action:

Take time this week to sit in silence. Find a quiet place to pray, as Jesus did, and talk with God as you would a dear friend.

Suggested Petitions:

For open hearts that trust in God even in our pain and suffering, we pray...

For the courage to continue building our personal relationship with Jesus that empowers us to speak truth to power and help those in need, we pray...

Prayer:

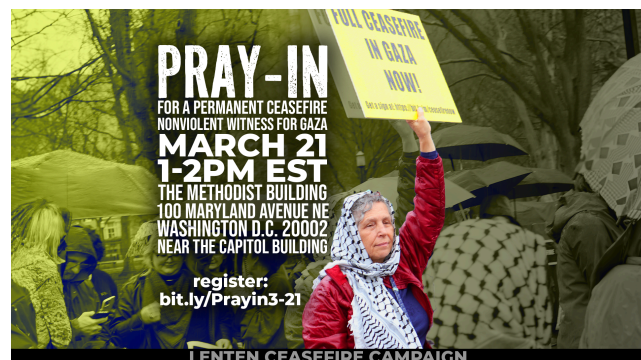
God of silence and God of all sound, open my ears and help me to listen. As I seek to hear You today for instruction, correction and guidance, help me to confirm Your voice through Your Word. You said if I ask for wisdom, You will give it to me liberally, so I am asking for wisdom in the name of Jesus to hear You clearly and consistently today and every day. Help me to do the deep listening to the sounds of my soul, waiting to hear your soft voice calling me closer to you.

Amen

Christians for Ceasefire Actions This Week

On **Thursday, March 21 at 1 pm**, the Christians for Ceasefire Lenten Campaign continues with an in-person Pray-In for Ceasefire in Gaza near the U.S. Capitol. Please consider joining us; For more information on March 21 and other actions as it becomes available, please [sign up here](#). FAN will live stream the event on our [Instagram page](#).

There will also be Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimages organized by Churches for Middle East Peace in Washington, DC, Chicago, and the Twin Cities on **Saturday, March 23**; click [here](#) for more information.



FAN hosted a [peacebuilding dialogue](#) on March 14 between an Palestinian and Israeli, both of whom lost family members in the conflict. If you missed any of the event, click here to [watch the recording on YouTube](#).

FAN is part of a growing coalition of Christian organizations working together during Lent to advocate a ceasefire in Gaza as well as hostage releases. It's particularly important for the Christian call for peace to be heard by our leaders. Now is a critical time to ask your representatives to promote peace instead of funding more destructive weapons that will only fuel further violence in Gaza. [Urge Congress to promote peace](#). For updates on the ongoing campaign [sign up here](#).

If you support FAN's work for peace in Gaza and elsewhere, please consider [donating](#) and dedicate your donation to "Peace."

Awakening to Environmental Justice Workshops

FAN is excited to bring our network a workshop series dedicated to building environmental justice research skills. This 2-part virtual workshop series, "[Awakening to Environmental Justice](#)," will be held on **Tuesday April 2 & 9 at 4p-5:15p ET (1p-2:15p PT)**. Join us to learn how to research cases of environmental injustice in your state and how to respectfully engage with local activists.

[Click here to register](#).



Consider being a Poll Chaplain

As we think ahead to national elections in November that might well be tense, the role that people of faith can play in allaying fears, maintaining a peaceful atmosphere, and restoring the joy of civic participation is essential. One opportunity is to enlist as a "Poll Chaplain," a person of faith who will work with other faith leaders in your state to be a peaceful, de-escalating presence at polling places on Election Day, Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

Franciscan Action Network and other faith organizations are partnering with [Faiths United to Save Democracy](#) to recruit poll chaplains now, so that training can take place over the summer.

Poll chaplains will meet online a few times before the elections and will receive training in how to do this work, including specific training in how to de-escalate any tensions that might arise at the polls. **This opportunity is open to clergy, religious, and lay people**; all people of faith are welcome. The time commitment is modest: not more than a few hours of online training and meetings, and then a minimum commitment of three hours to be present at a designated polling station on election day. There is no charge involved in participating.



Faiths United is organizing groups of poll chaplains in **ten states (AL, AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, OH, PA, TX, and WI)** and is beginning with virtual "What's At Stake?" meetings in each state to help answer questions about voter registration, messaging, and engagement with community members. **If you live in one of the mentioned states and are considering participating, [contact us](#)** and we can connect you to a virtual meeting coming up.

JFI Webinar: Immigration and Refugee Legislation in the 2024 Congress

On March 27, 2024 at 2pm ET / 11am PT, Justice for immigrants will host a webinar on [Immigration and Refugee Legislation in the 2024 Congress](#). Hear from government relations experts from Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services and USCCB/Migration & Refugee Services as they discuss the legislative outlook in Congress this year for immigration, refugee and border legislation and funding.



[Register for the webinar.](#)

Civilize It: Our Catholic Response in a Polarized World

How is the Church called to respond in a polarized climate that threatens the unity of the Body of Christ and distances us from our brothers and sisters, how is the Church called to respond? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, Glenmary Home Missioners, and the Jesuit Conference will host a virtual event, [Civilize It: Our Catholic Response in a Polarized World](#) on March 20, 2024 at 4pm ET / 12pm PT to reflect on the challenge of polarization and on tools from our Catholic tradition that can help us heal Church and society.



Gloria Purvis, renowned Catholic speaker and host of The Gloria Purvis Podcast from America Magazine, will moderate the conversation. Panelists include: Kerry Alys Robinson, President and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, and Rev. Aaron Wessman, G.H.M., author of *The Church's Mission in a Polarized World*. [Register here](#) or watch the [livestream here](#).

Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

The **Kansas Franciscan Justice Circle** co-sponsored one of Fr. John Dear's stops in Kansas City on his book tour, featuring this latest book, *The Gospel of Peace, A Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence*. Over a hundred people heard an impassioned and informative presentation from Fr. John. FAN

called to
"WALK THE TALK"



will be hosting a stop on Fr. John's book tour in May at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in Washington, DC. Stay tuned for more details.

After the November decision was made that Ohio would open up its state parks and designated wildlife areas to fracking, members of the **Cleveland Franciscan Justice Circle** expressed great concern. Recently the companies that were awarded the bids became public and members of the Circle have connected with other groups in the state who are also concerned and advocating to protect these public lands from fracking.

The recently formed **Chicagoland Franciscan Justice Circle** has been reflecting on ways they experience and contribute to crucifixion and resurrection in their local contexts. Advocating in favor of programs that feed those experiencing hunger is one of many concerns present in the Circle and a member shared ideas on sending letters to elected officials in favor of a family-friendly Farm Bill.

Upcoming Franciscan Justice Circle meetings:

Virtual FJC (limited mobility): Thurs. March 21 at 11:00am Pacific / 2:00pm Eastern

Rochester, NY FJC: Thurs. March 21 at 3:30pm Eastern

E. Wisconsin FJC: Thurs. March 21 at 4:00pm Central

SoCal FJC: Thurs. March 21 at 6:00pm Pacific

Chicagoland FJC: Sat. March 23 at 10:00am In Person

Please contact [FAN staff](#) to connect to one of our 20+ [Franciscan Justice Circles](#) or find out more about forming one near you.