

FINDING PEACE *in* LENT

Reflections *on*
the Saint Francis
Peace Prayer



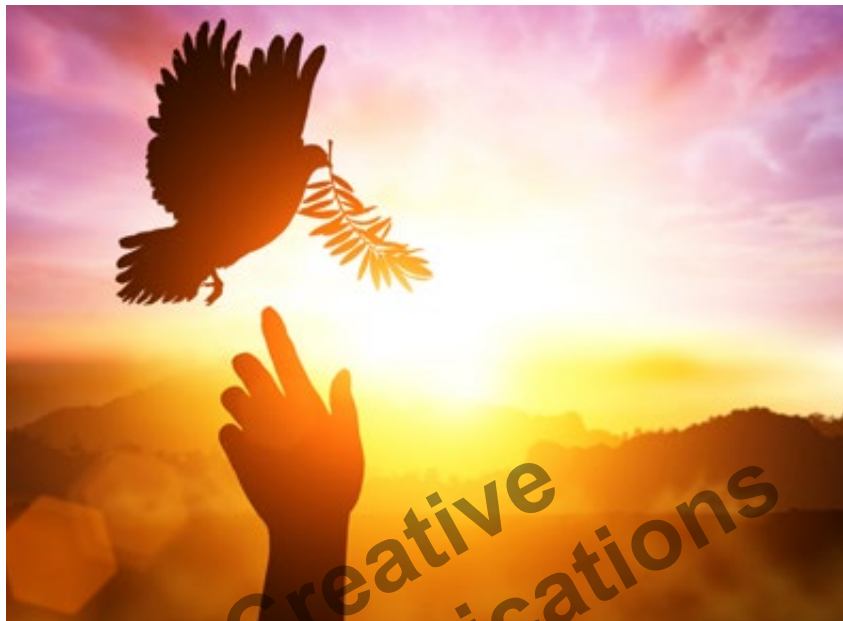
James E. Adams

*Lord, make me
an instrument
of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born
to eternal life.*



Introduction

The aim of this Lenten booklet is to help you revive personal prayer and commitment to gospel living through a greater appreciation of the Peace Prayer that is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226).

Francis was noted for the joy and selflessness with which he embraced other fellow creatures and all reality, including death. "Welcome, Sister Death!" he proclaimed shortly before he died.

A prayer that is so close to the gentle self-giving spirit of the gospel and one that calls us to transformation makes an ideal Lenten prayer. But why reflect on and analyze a simple prayer steeped in self-giving love and concern for others? How helpful can it be to take a heart-centered prayer and move it phrase by phrase through our heads? We do so with the hope that this effort will help us pray it more generously, more wisely.

James E. Adams

Praying Even When I Can't Do So Wholeheartedly

*...for God is greater than our hearts,
and he knows everything. 1 JOHN 3:20*

We are asking for a great spiritual gift in the Peace Prayer. We are asking to live a life of gospel holiness, deep faith, compelling hope and self-giving love. We are asking to serve God and our brothers and sisters. We are asking to be disciples.

Do we really want to pray such a prayer? Many of us are like the young Augustine: he was moved to ask God to make him chaste and holy—but not just yet! Perhaps it would be more realistic to lower our goals this Lent and ask to be faithful in, say, the Ten Commandments rather than aspiring to become a self-giving instrument of God's peace.

No, the reach of our prayers must exceed the grasp. There may be times when we don't feel like praying a prayer that seems to put us on the spot as this one does. Yet we realize that we are called anew each day to live the gospel. We realize also that our responses of faith ultimately are based on our will rather than on our feelings. We choose this, knowing full well that we may not be ready to choose it with our whole heart and soul. If we pray only when our faint heart conforms to all the aspirations of our prayer, how much praying would we do?

On this Ash Wednesday, let us humbly accept that, in our frailty, our prayer isn't always as wholehearted as we'd like, and that, even on our best days, our weak wills may seem to be hedging.

Is my commitment to prayer too dependent on my feelings?

Do I avoid some prayers because they seem to demand too much of me?

Dare We Aspire to Goals Short of Our Calling?

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these... **JOHN 14:12**

We cannot pray the Peace Prayer eagerly or live it fully until we begin to see ourselves as disciples called to live the life Jesus himself lived. Yes, we are challenged to think of ourselves as brothers and sisters of Jesus called to the same heights of self-giving love as Jesus. Bringing love for hatred, pardon for injury, faith for doubt, hope for despair, light for darkness and joy for sadness was what Jesus did on earth. This pattern of resisting evil with good followed from Jesus' relationship with the Father. Easy for him to do, we might object, because *he* was the Son of God. But Jesus revealed that *we* also are sons and daughters of God, and he promised that we can do even greater things than he because of our relationship to the Father and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Søren Kierkegaard wrote: "Christ comes to the world as the example, constantly enjoining: Imitate me. We humans prefer to adore him instead."

We are called not just to believe *in* Jesus in the sense that we trust he has saved us. We are also called to believe *as* Jesus believed—to respond to life as Jesus responded.

Do I realize that I am called to believe and to live as Jesus did?

To respond to others the way Jesus responded to them?

Prayer Is an Act of Worship

Know that the LORD is God.

*It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. PSALM 100:3*

What we ask for in the Peace Prayer or any prayer reveals what is valuable to us—at least what we say we want. We trust that the Holy Spirit inspires us to ask for the right things when we pray. Yet we must always have the even more basic expectation that the Holy Spirit inspires us to pray. What we pray for is secondary; *that* we pray is primary.

Prayer is homage, an old-fashioned word rarely used anymore. Homage has the Latin root, “humus” (earth), the origin also of “humble.” Would it even occur to us to reach out to God unless we realize that we are creatures and need to defer to our Creator? This, surely, is the psychological bedrock of prayer. Prayer is an act of worship that we freely give when we sense who we are over against our Creator.

The basic impulse to pray is something we share with other religions. But in our Christian faith we have an additional incentive. The Creator has revealed a lavish plan of redemption, so that now we approach God as our loving Savior as well.

Do I pray and seek to honor God daily? Am I mindful that God is my Creator and the Creator of all reality? Do I try to stay aware of God as the source of all that I am?

I Pray When I Know God Is in Control

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things... **REVELATION 4:11**

We pray eagerly only when we appreciate fully that we are creatures—and that, ultimately, we are not in control. We must frequently ask: how much have I been influenced by the “enlightened secularism” of this age, which tells me God is an irrelevant footnote to progressive human history and urges me to rely on myself for all I am, do or have? “You’re in control,” the voice of secularism says, “and if any progress is to be made it’s up to you alone to do it.” The psychological demand this puts on us can be overwhelming. The weaker our faith in God as Creator and Sustainer of all, the more burdens we subconsciously put on ourselves.

That’s why a fresh awareness of myself as a creature is so profoundly liberating. Imagine the deep sigh of relief when it dawns on me that I’m not the only—much less the most important—player on the stage of my life. I can relax once I begin to accept myself for what I truly am, a creature dependent on God to be filled and fulfilled. That is the truth about myself that can begin to set me free. That truth frees me to do more, not less, for myself.

If I am living this truth, then prayer becomes as natural as breathing. Prayer becomes something I’m drawn to.

What self-images control my daily life? Do I see myself first and foremost in relation to God? Does my relationship with God need a critical examination?



Enliven your personal prayer life this Lent by reflecting upon, and praying with, the St. Francis Peace Prayer, a prayer that calls us to transformation and to living a more gentle, self-giving life. In these pages, you will have the opportunity to pray the Peace Prayer with your whole heart, united in the spirit of the gospel and prepared to put your prayer into action each day of Lent, bringing yourself and others closer to the peace of Christ.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#)

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