

**National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order  
October 14, 2008**

**Thank you. I was given a few minutes on your busy agenda tonight and I would like to use that time to reflect on the vocation to peacemaking in which we as Franciscans are well engaged.**

**Because I work for Maryknoll I am constantly steeped in the richness of missionaries' stories from around the world. Most of them are now -- as they have been for too many years -- about dehumanization and exclusion. They are about "throw-away" people whose intrinsic dignity is discarded by local and global societies. Sometimes they are stories about dramatic breakthroughs, glimmers of the New Creation -- and about the backlash that success on the margins elicits. Sometimes Maryknollers share amazing stories about survivors whose lives sing of gritty hope and who pass on that hope to those who not only listen, but who *hear* them and are changed by it.**

**Even before this financial mess in which we are all immersed, their stories were about people who are unemployed and underemployed -- who work long hours, yet barely survive; people who are old too soon and tired; people whose work in mines or factories or fields is dangerous for themselves, for their communities, for the earth; people whose labor enriches others -- close to home and on the other side of the world, but never provides the workers themselves with a decent quality of life.**

**To work for peace is to work for those clinging to life on the margins of our world. To work for peace is to work for an end to dehumanizing poverty and economic injustice.**

**As you can imagine, many Maryknoll stories are about people on the move -- people trying another route to survive and to support their families, people trying to find a new and, they hope, better way of life. Many now live in your neighborhoods and mine. Too many of these migrants were forced to uproot because life was simply not sustainable where they were living -- due to war or environmental degradation or**

poverty. Most have left gaping holes in families and communities back home. All encounter almost insurmountable obstacles on the way. Many live with horrendous violence. Some die en route; others are sent back home, often to try again; yet others make it to lands of opportunity. Sometimes life *is* better there. Sometimes those who move think it is, but soon are caught by immigration officials or fall into the dangerous quicksand of accumulated consumer stuff.

To work for peace is to accompany them, to advocate for justice for migrants, for tolerance, for hospitality.

Many Maryknoll stories are about violence – the violence of oppression, of torture and disappearances, of exclusion, of sexual abuse and sexism, of trafficking in human beings, of ethnic violence and racism, of war and militarism. They are also about non-violence, active non-violence, that has sometimes (maybe more than we notice) opened spaces for new life, new political realities, new relationships.

Their stories are about friends and neighbors who have struggled with the meaning of reconciliation in the wake of horrible abuse or repression – who have rejected cheap reconciliation, cheap forgiveness and held out for the slowly emerging, genuine healing that has sometimes come. Their patience and determination that the terror would never again return has tilled the soil for new understandings of reconciliation.

To work for peace is to struggle for an end to destructive violence – for an end to war, all war, for an end to all the ways our societies attack and destroy human life. To work for peace is to promote reconciliation.

Maryknoll stories more and more now are about the earth and the growing evidence of possibly irrevocable damage to creation. They are about the impact of global warming on the glaciers that supply essential water to whole countries. They are about the deep gashes and toxic residue of mines that wound the earth and the

**communities that depend on her. They are about enormously profitable logging ventures that destroy carefully tended indigenous habitats and about mega-farms that now feed gourmet appetites in the north, while farm workers and their families and local communities go hungry. These stories have helped nourish a cosmivision that is in harmony with Francis' vision of creation – that sees more and more clearly the intrinsic interconnection between the human community and the earth community and the common threats to both.**

**To work for peace is to care for the earth. To work for peace is to stop current (and prevent future) wars over scarce resources by careful conservation and intervention to slow or reverse climate change.**

**All of these stories are about people and the earth who are living with a global system of unjust relationships that produce or contribute to dehumanization and exclusion, violence, poverty, forced migration, ecological destruction and war.**

**To work for peace is to work for right relationships within an inclusive community of life.**

**In the last hundred years, the world has lived through war, genocide and brutal repression that collectively have taken millions of lives. Each one was beloved ... each one victimized by the Nazi holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the Rwandan genocide, the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia -- the massacres in Guatemala and El Salvador; the slaughter in Darfur -- and, tragically, on and on.**

**Several months after the U.S. war began there, I had the great privilege of visiting Afghanistan. This is the war that has been most often called “just” – “the central theater in the war on terror.” In Kabul I met an eight-year-old girl named Amena. Amena was in the kitchen when bombs aimed at the Taliban or Al Qaeda struck her house near Kanduz, Afghanistan. Her mother, her brothers, her sisters, her cousins,**

her aunt and her uncle were killed, sixteen people in all, including a two-day-old baby. Her father survived but with horrendous physical and emotional injuries. The bombs went terribly awry -- the closest Taliban were 10 km away -- but regrets about a serious targeting error will not bring back Amena's family. She and other survivors of war around the world know too well its indiscriminate destructive violence.

What does it mean to make peace in circumstances like these? What does it mean to make peace in a world where our national security seems to depend on the destruction of enemies surrounded by families like Amena's? Francis' approach to "the enemy" is particularly relevant in these times. He refused to believe that the sultan was an enemy to be killed in the name of God. He implored political (and religious) leaders to stop waging war and he loved those whom his nation defined as the enemy. Francis' approach to the sultan was a clear repudiation of the holy war mentality of his time, a courageous step trusting in the basic goodness of the "other" and powerful example for us.

I believe deeply that all of us who claim to follow Francis and Clare carry within our tradition the seeds of another way, another approach to personal, community and national security – that repudiates as Francis did the enemy-making and orchestration of fear so dominant in our U.S. approach to the world. I also believe that we Franciscans are obligated to nurture the soil of trust and right relationships in which to plant them.

To live in trust on a personal and interpersonal level is hard enough, but to generate this kind of thinking at the heart of U.S. foreign policy and international relations is an enormous challenge to would-be peacemakers.

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is from Peter's epistle (Chapter 3: 15) "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." I like this passage because Peter simply

*assumes* that those who follow Jesus *will* have hope, will believe that the impossible is possible. It is in fact one of the defining characteristics of the Christian community. We are Resurrection people – we are *hoppers*. But for the vast majority of people in our world whose lives are immersed in a tragic contemporary reality, who live face to face with evil and its consequences, with horrendous suffering, with a devastated earth, with war -- it is a very challenging passage. And for those of us who would be peacemakers in this broken world, it is also very challenging. Can we -- is it possible for us -- to give an accounting for our hope?

The mandate of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is to work for “peace, social justice and the integrity of creation.” Often we find ourselves *denouncing* rather than *announcing* -- holding onto hope that is admittedly thin: hope that we can stop torture, eradicate poverty, end wars -- at least *this* war or *that* war -- reverse climate change, eliminate weapons of mass destruction and terrorism and racism. Unfortunately, I think we will always have to be about the task of denouncing, of stopping, of reversing.

That is part of the vocation of privileged people in an impoverished world -- of peaceful people in a world of random and not-so-random violence -- of secure people in a threatened world -- of over-consuming people in a world of limited resources. But that is not our main vocation. There is an announcing side to this mandate as well.

Right next to the devastated landscape of an impoverished, violent, unjust and damaged world some sturdy little flowers continue to sprout. They enable us day-after-day, year-after-year, in an increasingly bleak world, to give an accounting of our hope.

Close to home we see them clearly: our children, their children, students and young friends who are searching through all the distractions and temptations and fears of youth to identify and start down their own “right” pathway toward a meaningful

life; wise and faithful “elders” in all our communities who live the Gospel fully and with passion; servant leaders in our places of work, our parishes, our neighborhoods, our cities and towns, our country who dedicate themselves in hundreds of different ways to the common good; and the prophets among us who make us uncomfortably aware of the distance we have yet to go before we are who we are called to be.

The flowers we encounter in this broken world are often small, but they are of many different colors and varieties and they are beautiful, each one. They are sprouting vigorously as more and more people come to believe that another world is possible and are giving their lives -- living out their vocations -- to make the “other world” a reality.

We are clearer than we have ever been before that justice for human beings and justice for the rest of creation, including the earth herself, are intrinsically interconnected. We are clearer than ever before that without social justice there will be no peace and that without peace there will be no social justice. We know that the roots of the flowers are woven together. They will thrive only in the soil of global solidarity, nourished by a faith that calls us to account for the hope that is in us. Our task is to see these flowers sprouting, to celebrate them and to help them grow.

Both Matthew and Luke give explicit instructions for the followers of Jesus that describe quite well how we might be peacemakers in these times. To live according to their instructions would distinguish us from the mainstream of western culture as clearly as Francis and Clare and their followers stood out from the mainstream in their times:

- *To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your shirt. (Luke 6: 29) Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. (Luke 6:30)*

- *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44)*
- *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt 6: 19-21)*
- *Do to others what you would have them do to you ...(Mt 7:12; Luke 6: 30)*

**To translate these prescriptions (do not withhold even your shirt ... love your enemies ... do unto others what you would have them do to you ...) into our relationships with other cultures and countries -- To translate this clear mandate (do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ...) into personal and collective lifestyles – our use of natural resources -- To infuse our nation and our world with this approach to the “other” would, without a doubt, propel our violent and violated world toward the peace that all Franciscans so ardently seek. Thank you.**