



I Want To Join Pax Christi USA and Help Make A Difference!

Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation.

Pax Christi USA commits itself to peace education and, with the help of its bishop members, promotes the gospel imperative of peacemaking as a priority in the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the efforts of all its members and in cooperation with other groups, Pax Christi USA works toward a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

I support Pax Christi USA's Statement of Purpose and wish to become a member.

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Enclosed is my membership donation of

\$50 \$35 \$75 \$100

At this time I can only contribute \$ _____

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Prayer

God of peace, we live in a culture that seeks to manipulate us through fear. Headlines scream: "Be afraid!" Advertisements prod our deepest insecurities and anxieties.

Our political and corporate leaders know that if we fear, then they can do whatever they want and we will follow.

But over and over again in scripture, You call to us: "Be not afraid!"

Your words penetrate us, past the noise, over the tumult: "Do not fear. . ."

From Your Word we regain our freedom. No longer afraid, we speak the truth, we live the truth, and we become that peace which we seek.

In Your peace, we pray: Amen.

Monday: "Do not fear nor be dismayed, for your God is with you wherever you go."—Joshua 1:9

Tuesday: "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."—Arundhati Roy

Wednesday: Although people in the United States consume twice as much as we did in the 1950s, the number of people who rated themselves "very happy" peaked in 1957.

Thursday: "Building community is a radical activity in an alienated society. It is a prophetic statement to our dominant culture of isolation and individualism. . . . It is an alternative vision of reality that contradicts society's fear of the stranger. . . . It is a clear affirmation that the human family is one."—Christine Vladimiroff, OSB

Friday: "Live simply that others may simply live."—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Saturday: "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish.

. . . Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."—McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen in *Compassion*

Sunday: "Thus says Yahweh . . . Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. . . ."—Isaiah 43:1-2

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Pray both individually and in community to overcome the fears in yourself and in our society.

Seek out a group in your community that is working to bring together people from different backgrounds—cultural, racial, class, religion, etc.—and join in the process of breaking down barriers, knowing that fear is often rooted in the unknown or misunderstanding.

Make a list, in your Pax Christi group or small faith community, of the ways that fear influences debate on key issues of our time. Begin or end your meetings by holding these items up and reciting together the prayer in this Peaceweavings.

Speak with your family, including children, about the role fear plays in influencing our thoughts and actions. Talk about ways you can lessen fear individually and in your community.

Examine your conscience, listing your fears. Think about what role these play in your own life and especially in your relationships.

Study the history and stories of those who have worked to live without fear and to build a community based on justice, solidarity, and compassion. Some examples: Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Marian Wright Edelman, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Walter Rauschenbush.

Commit to standing in solidarity with a group or persons you may previously have seen as an enemy or been opposed to. Listen to their concerns; be transformed.

Contact elected officials on an issue of your choice and urge them to act out of compassion, freedom, and solidarity, rather than fear.

Regularly move out of your "comfort zone" to encounter and learn from those from a different race, ethnicity, religion, class, or ideology.

Host Tom Cordaro's speaking tour in your school, parish, or community. For more information, visit www.paxchristiusa.org or e-mail Tom Cordaro at tomcordaro@juno.com.

Challenge consumer culture. Practice sharing, bartering, recycling, building or growing your own. Give the gift of your time or energy.

Summer 2009

Peaceweavings

Living Unafraid: A Spiritual Path to Freedom

If we believe that God does not intend us to live in fear, how do we make the conscious decision to live unafraid? Perhaps a new spiritual discipline based in mindfulness, compassion, humility, and solidarity can move us from fear to freedom.



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Living Unafraid: A Spiritual Path to Freedom

by Tom Cordaro, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

It seems we live surrounded by fear: fear of losing what we have, fear of those who are different from us, fear that the world's goods are not enough to go around, fear that we will lose our place in the order of the world, fear that our ideas, beliefs, and even very selves may be proven wrong or insufficient. Yet when we really examine it, what does this fear, sent across the airwaves, splashed in the headlines, and boring into our very souls, get us? It necessitates that we live in fortresses, defending ourselves from enemies everywhere, from the person across the street to those on the other side of national borders.

If we believe this is not the way God intends us to live, how do we make the conscious decision to live unafraid? How do we make the decision to take back the power to shape our perceptions and free ourselves to make different choices?

Primarily, this choice is a spiritual challenge. To be successful, we need to do more than offer a new political platform or analysis; we need a spiritual revival that is first and foremost a revolution of the heart. We must commit to a personal and collective journey from a *fear of others* to a *freedom to be for others*. The journey from fear to freedom is a spiritual discipline expressed in concrete choices we make every day. It is supported by community and nurtured in contemplative prayer. The journey is a spiritual path marked by five interrelated virtues: mindfulness, compassion, solidarity, humility, and freedom.

The first, primary, and also most difficult dynamic of this spiritual path is the journey from a life focused on acquisition to a life of mindfulness. Our culture of addictive consumerism prevents us from seeing and believing the truth about ourselves. And what is that truth? We are sons of God. We are daughters of the Most High Creator. We are not the many labels the world puts on us; we are not defined by the corporate logos on our clothing; we

are more than what we eat, what we wear, what we produce, or what we drive.

In contrast to the fearful messages bombarding us, mindfulness gives us the ability to see what is real, to let go of all the clutter in our lives and to be fully present to each moment. When we are fully present, we discover that we don't need the many masks we wear. Living in the moment frees us from the pain and disappointments of the past that cripple us; it frees us from the anxieties and fears of the future that feed our compulsive need for control.

This mindfulness is nurtured through contemplative prayer, a great counter-sign in our consumerist, acquisition-focused, production-oriented culture. In prayer, we rest in being, not in doing; prayer neither produces nor consumes anything. Contemplative prayer teaches us that every moment is a sacred invitation from God to become fully human and fully alive. To sustain the discipline of contemplative prayer, we need the support of fellow seekers who will affirm us and prod us onward when the dominant culture tempts us to surrender to the frenzy.

As mindfulness supported in prayer and community enables us to begin to see ourselves and others as we really are, we open to the movement of compassion. We enter places of pain, fear, and brokenness, both in ourselves and others. And only those who have nothing to protect or defend can have the kind of radical compassion necessary to live unafraid. We learn to relinquish the posture of having it all together; we learn to be fully present to suffering, without pre-conditions or requirements. Genuine compassion becomes possible when we gain the courage to remove our egos from the center of our lives to create a space for the other to enter. If our hearts are full of ourselves, we have no room for anyone else. And compassion requires that we be HERE, not replaying what happened yesterday

or thinking about what we need to do tomorrow.

And deep compassion carries us further on this spiritual journey. Compassion moves many of us to works of charity and acts of justice. These acts are often from a service model of discipleship, assuming that we have it made and need to pull others (the "less fortunate") up. But this model often leads to a desire to control. And when control becomes our objective, fear is often a byproduct.

Our spiritual journey requires an entirely different model: one of solidarity, meaning standing with others. To be in solidarity means relinquishing client relationships and any political, economic, social, cultural, or religious dividing lines. It means being willing to learn from those we pity, those who repulse us, those who are

needy, those we fear, and those whom we call our enemies. It means giving up feelings rooted in a sense of our own superiority. It involves entering into relationships of accountability with those outside of our comfort zones and having our lives changed by these encounters. It means being open to the truth of another person and always having the best interests of the other in mind.

Being in true solidarity is humbling because it forces us to recognize our own powerlessness to "solve" even some of the smallest of human problems. Through solidarity, we come to truly understand our own limits. Humility born of solidarity tends to pull down the dividing lines that we erect to convince ourselves of differences

between ourselves and those we seek to serve or convert to our way of thinking. Humility opens us to learning or hearing something new and to transformation.

Once we have been humbled by our relationships of solidarity with those outside our comfort zones, a new dynamic begins to manifest in our spiritual journey. As we relinquish our political, moral, spiritual, social, and economic high ground and give up trying to always be in control, we discover freedom. Freed from the illusions of power, freed

Our culture of addictive consumerism prevents us from seeing and believing the truth about ourselves. And what is that truth? We are sons of God. We are daughters of the Most High Creator. We remember this through contemplative prayer, which teaches us that every moment is a sacred invitation from God to become fully human and fully alive.

from the need to be gods, freed from the need to have a solution to every problem, we are free to act in faith, without worrying about protecting or defending our self-image, political ideology, or five-year plan for saving the world.

We are free to live in the fullness of the moment without worrying about the crushing demands of tomorrow's problems or the overwhelming weight of regret for yesterday's failures. In short, we are free to seek first the Reign of God and God's righteousness, knowing that all the things we need will come to us as they are needed. After discarding a lot of baggage and treasure—whether fame, wealth, ideology, or certitude—we are able to embrace the freedom and fullness of life that God offers us. We can join with the many others making a mindful spiritual journey from fear to freedom, acting with compassion, solidarity, and humility.

Tom Cordaro has worked as a professional speaker, writer, organizer, and national leader in the faith-based peace and justice movement for thirty years. In 2008, he received the Pax Joliet Peace Award from the Catholic Diocese of Joliet for his work as the Justice & Outreach Minister at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Naperville, Illinois. This piece is adapted from his award-winning book, Be Not Afraid: An Alternative to the "War on Terror," which is available at www.paxchristiusa.org.