

Walking with Jesus for Peace: A Reflection from Fr. Henri Nouwen

One year, during Holy Week, a small group of theology students invited me to join them in a prayer vigil at Electric Boat, the nuclear submarine shipyard in Groton, Connecticut. . . . On Good Friday we went to Groton to witness for peace in front of the administration building of Electric Boat. The leaders of the group asked me to lead the community in the Stations of the Cross. . . . As a child I had often made these fourteen stations in church. They commemorate fourteen events between Jesus' being condemned to death by Pontius Pilate and his burial. These events have been vividly portrayed in paintings and sculpture, and I remember well how my Dutch teenage friends and I walked from station to station in the chapel of our high school, not once in a while, but many times a week during our lunch breaks.

But as I grew older, the Stations of the Cross soon became a pious childhood memory. With many of my fellow Catholics, I dropped this devotional practice and focused on official liturgical celebration. Who would have dreamt that decades later I would lead an ecumenical group of theology students in the Stations of the Cross on the streets of Gorton, Connecticut, in prayerful resistance against an impending nuclear holocaust?

We prayed fervently with words and songs as well as in silence. We heard the story of Jesus' suffering in a way that we could not have heard it in any church. It was hard for me to know fully how I felt, but something new was happening to me that I had never experienced before. It was the deep awareness that prayer was no longer a neutral event without danger. Moreover, the words I had so often spoken from pulpits about death and resurrection, about suffering and new life, suddenly received a new power, a power to unambiguously condemn death and call forth life.

- *Eternal Seasons: A Liturgical Journey with Henri J.M. Nouwen* (2003), pp. 110-111.

Question: Where can you walk the Stations of the Cross this Lent to pray for peace and the end of the war in Iraq?

For Peace In Iraq: Stations of the Cross

First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

Despite the pleas of Pope John II and the U.S. Bishops, the US decides to invade Iraq on March 20, 2003. Thousands of Iraqi civilians, children, women and men, are condemned to die. Once again, in the least of these, Christ is condemned to die.

We adore you, Christ, and we bless you. By the power of your holy cross help us to change the world by bringing peace.

Second Station: Jesus Takes Up the Cross

As people of faith, we are called to take on the challenge of standing for peace in a violent world. We must take on the burden of peacemaking in a difficult time.

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Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

On February 22, 2006, one of the holiest sites in Shi'a Islam, the Al Askari Mosque, was utterly destroyed by bombings, and at least 165 persons are thought to have been killed. The bombing was sign of the continuing animosity between the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in Iraq.

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Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Iraqi and American women who have lost children in the ongoing conflict in Iraq have met, wept together, and promised to work for peace. Mary is reflected in their tears and their hope.

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Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

Congregations, churches and faith-based organizations have joined together to work for the end of the Iraq war. These interfaith alliances are a visible sign of peace.

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Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Many prisoners in Iraq jails waited in vain for solace and any Christian touch.

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Peace Stations of the Cross (continued)

Seventh Station: Jesus Stumbles a Second Time

On March 6, 2006, Amnesty International reported that prisoner abuse and torture continues in Iraq's prisons, despite the horror and shock after the exposure of atrocity at Abu Ghraib.

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Eighth Station: The Women of Jerusalem Weep for Jesus

We join in the weeping of so many women as they witness the destruction of war and the endless loss of life. They are often left behind to take care of children, traumatized by violence.

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Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

At least seventeen percent of Iraq veterans experience major depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The percentage may actually be much greater, as many soldiers want to avoid the stigma that goes with treatment.

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Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

War humiliates human beings in so many ways, including the humiliation of torture, and it denies their human dignity.

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Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Pope John XXIII warns us in his *Pacem in Terris* that any kind of war in the modern age can no longer be considered just. War wounds the human spirit deeply.

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Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Day by day, the death toll mounts in the war in Iraq. How many deaths will we have to count before peace can be reconstructed in this suffering country?

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Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

We are called to deep compassion for those suffering from the Iraq war, including soldiers on both sides who must face the deaths they have caused.

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Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Peace is still only a wish, a hope, a prayer in the darkness of these days, but we continue to seek the light.

We adore you, Christ, and we bless you. By the power of your holy cross help us to change the world by bringing peace.

Fifteenth Station: The Resurrection

"Peace be with you" . . . and Christ showed them his hands and his side. This grounds our faith in the possibility of peace. Christ is the Light and our hope. Peace be with you and all those in Iraq.

We adore you, Christ, and we bless you. By the power of your holy cross help us to change the world by bringing peace.

