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A Catholic Worker's prayer to St. Francis

Joshua J. McElwee | Oct. 4, 2012 NCR Today

In my mind, Art Laffin always has a bullhorn wedged under his arm. He's standing in front of the White House.

Gathered with a few others to witness to some aspect of Catholic social teaching -- on war, debt relief, abortion -- he tentatively begins to sing the prayer of St. Francis. Despite the amplification, his voice is soft.

He starts -- "*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love*" -- lifting his pitch as he stretches the word "love" over three separate beats.

It's a hazy image now, but one well-remembered on St. Francis' feast day.

Art is a long-time Catholic Worker, which is to say he lives in a tradition of those who strive to live out the works of mercy and who seek to give voice to the Gospel at all times. Throughout the country, there are many communities which call themselves Catholic Workers [1], after a tradition started by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933.

Typically hodgepodge affairs, located on the margins of their city, many of the communities open their doors and offer food, company and a kind ear to those that stop by. Likely, everything they have has been donated and is given freely to those in need.

Art and his family are members of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker community in Washington, D.C [2], where they host a weekly meal open to their community and house several families who would otherwise have nowhere to go.

They also hold those gatherings -- peace vigils, really -- outside the White House, once a week. Outside the Pentagon too.

Attending college in DC, I met Art somewhat accidentally years ago. I still can't shake the image of him standing quietly, singing that prayer.

All this is prologue. Last December, Art visited the crypt in Assisi where St. Francis is buried. While there, he wrote the prayer below. From this man, on St. Francis' day, it's worth taking the moment to read and reflect through it.

Prayer to St. Francis
By Art Laffin

St. Francis, most faithful disciple of Jesus, holy one of the poor, servant of the outcasts, lover of creation,

you who bore the sacred stigmata of Jesus,
thank you for showing everyone -- past and present -- how much God loves us and that we are all children of the same Creator.

Thank you for showing the world how to love, to practice voluntary poverty and to safeguard our sacred earth and environment.

You who kissed a leper and washed their wounds, thank you for your solidarity with the least of these--the poor, rejected and despised.

Thank you for your choice to renounce possessions and wealth so that you could devote your life, without compromise, to Jesus.
Thank you for so powerfully exemplifying the words of Jesus: "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

Thank you for showing the world the path to real peace.
You quit being a soldier and laid down your weapons, and, in the midst of war, met with the Sultan in Egypt.
Help me and all people to be an instrument of God's peace and reconciling love and, to embrace as you did so completely, Jesus' way of nonviolence.
Empower me, and all people, to know that the only way to bring about lasting peace and justice is by living out God's call of love, compassion, mercy and justice.

Help me, and all people, to share what we have, especially the rich and affluent. Help me and all people to dismantle and change structures and policies that exploit and oppress.
Help me, and all people, to work for the common good and reject the sins of violence, greed and war, and anything that wounds or divides.

Help me to always bring unity where there is discord, to bring light where there is darkness, and to bring hope where there is despair.

St. Francis, help me to relinquish all fears and anxieties, so that I can have a heart of love like you had.
Intercede for me so that I can completely trust in the God who is the source of all life.

Most holy poor man of Assisi, help me always to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.

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Links:
[1] http://www.catholicworker.org/
[2] http://dccatholicworker.wordpress.com/