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A portrait of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter hangs in St. Mary's Cathedral during his beatification in Linz, Austria, Oct. 26, 2007. Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, seated at far right, presided at the ceremony. (CNS/Reuters)



by John Dear

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On this week's episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," I reflect on [Franz Jägerstätter](#), one of the most important saints in history.

In the late 1970s, my grandmother gave me a pamphlet about Franz. I was amazed by the story of a young Austrian farmer, born on May 20, 1907, who in 1936 married Franziska, the local sacristan at their church in St. Radegund. Franziska was a saint, and so he tried to become one, too. Together, they inspired me.

When the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938, nearly everyone in Austria supported them. In February 1943, Franz received a letter ordering him to turn himself in and join the Nazi military, where he would be sent off to the Russian front. He had spoken with several priests and even the bishop. Each one of them advised him to fight for Hitler. But what about Jesus? he asked. So Franz refused to fight, was arrested, imprisoned, taken to Berlin, brought before the Nazi high court, condemned to death for "undermining military morale," and beheaded on Aug. 9, 1943.

I've been studying him for decades, and in the 1990s, became friends with Franziska and the family. In this episode, I'll reflect on Franz and Franziska, his beatification in Austria, and some concluding lessons, which I hope will encourage you in your own commitment to the nonviolent Jesus.

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In particular, Franz demonstrates a new political mysticism, a sanctity that is a threat to empire and the culture of war. This needs to become the new norm, as it was in the early church.

"As a Christian, I prefer to do my fighting with the Word of God and not with arms," Franz wrote from prison. "We need no rifles or pistols for our battle, but instead spiritual weapons — and the foremost among these is prayer. ... Let us love our enemies, bless those who curse us, pray for those who persecute us. For love will conquer and will endure for all eternity. And happy are they who live and die in God's love."

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