

we are called to love our enemies, to do what we can to protect them. Failure to do so is not only a sin of omission; it is the opposite of love: it is an act of indifference.

When we take this call to heart, we may very well find ourselves embroiled in public turmoil, the object of ridicule, but in exchange we will experience a deep inner peace. The God of the whole human race will take our love and transform us all.

Not only can our love help save our enemies, like the beautiful children of Iraq, it can save us as well.

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## Building Community

We cannot pursue a life of peace alone. Our culture is so violent and broken, and we too are so violent and broken, that we need the support of friends to live. Otherwise, our own violence can crush us.

If we want to spend our lives making peace in a war-torn world, we need to get together and build a community.

As in Alcoholics Anonymous, each of us needs a safe community of friends where we can confess our violence and brokenness, receive a warm welcome, be encouraged, turn back to our Higher Power, and find hope and strength to go on. With support, we can withstand whatever challenges arise.

When I committed to the journey of faith and nonviolence, I knew that I needed community. I felt called to the solitary life of celibacy, but I knew that I could not sustain such a life on my own. If I was to minister in the church, I had to have

the steadfast support, care, and encouragement of a faith-filled, loving community.

I have lived in fourteen Jesuit communities around the country since I joined the Society of Jesus in 1982. From Washington, D.C., to Oakland, New York City to Virginia, El Salvador to Northern Ireland, I have lived in community, a difficult, challenging, and always blessed experience. In community, as we share our lives and serve one another, we experience moments of grace, filled with the loving presence of God in our midst.

As the years go by, I find I need community more and more, including the experience of community among peace and justice groups across the country. In these grassroots communities, I find renewed energy and new friends who enrich my life.

If we want to live a life of peace, we need to risk new relationships. Widening the circle of communities that resist war and injustice, we expand the whole peace movement and together sound a stronger and clearer voice. Our lives bear more fruit than when we work alone.

Jesus understood the importance of community. After his baptism and solitary sojourn of prayer in the desert, Jesus quickly formed a community of friends around him. This was his first public act. He invited his friends to join him on his journey. Eventually, he formalized a circle of twelve friends

and missioned them to form other communities. With this circle of friends, he shared his contemplative life, his vision of God, his love, his prayer, and his very being.

Without intimate companionship, Jesus' example may have died with him on the cross. Jesus also knew that he needed community. In his human existence, he discovered the beauty of friendship, the joy of celebration, and the peace of fellowship with others. Community was at the heart of his prayer: "that all may be one."

All the great saints believed in the power of community. St. Ignatius' community, the Companions of Jesus, regularly shared "spiritual conversation." Each day, they took time to talk about God, Jesus, Mary, the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit. They were devout men of prayer. They spent rich hours in silent meditation, Bible study, readings of the Psalms, Eucharist, and reflection on life together in this world. As they shared their experiences of God with one another, they grew spiritually and they found strength from within their community to reach out to others.

Our life today, as recent Jesuit documents state, is life in "a community of brothers, who hold all things in common, who serve others and follow Jesus together." Together we "search for the will of God by means of a shared reflection on the signs which point where the Spirit of Christ is leading." We Jesuits strive to share our contemplative prayer with one another, so

that we can better follow not our will but the will of God and the spirit of God moving in the world. This ideal is not easy to fulfill. It is a daily struggle. And generally speaking, we don't just fall short of this ideal, we regularly fall flat on our faces. But this struggle is interrupted by moments of grace! And our journey together is rich with blessings.

History's great peacemakers surrounded themselves with community. St. Francis founded his "Order of Friars Minor" to wander in poverty, preach the Gospel, and live together as brothers. Dorothy Day formed the Catholic Worker "to make it easier for people to be good." Mahatma Gandhi created his first ashram in Durban, South Africa, not long after he visited a Trappist monastery and saw the transforming power of life in community. Though Thomas Merton hungered for deep solitude, eventually moving into the woods and living as a hermit, he remained rooted to his monastic community and the reality of human relationships. He knew that without them, he would be lost.

But good community life does not just fall from the sky. It requires constant hard work and generosity. It is a daily struggle. As your companions discover your faults and weaknesses, and confront you to correct them and help you grow, it can be humiliating. Community demands regular engagement with people whom you would otherwise just avoid. It requires loving and serving those around you. As we pray together, share

our hearts and lives with each other, we also learn to forgive one another, let go of our resentments, respect one another, and care for one another. Though community living is demanding and at times frustrating, it offers moments of pure grace, even revelation.

If a community is to grow, its members must fully share their lives with one another. Community life demands care, active listening to one another, and patient presence, especially when a community member is hurting. Communities flourish when their members regularly break bread, celebrate their joys, take risks for justice and peace, share their pain, and forgive one another.

Most of all, communities blossom when members share their personal experiences of God. We may live, eat, work, and share our resources together, but without revealing our contemplative love, we might as well be strangers staying at the Holiday Inn. When community members share their encounters with God, they enter into sacred space. As we share our intimate relationships with God, we deepen the human bonds between us, and experience a new and richer peace. In the process, God is revealed. As God moves in our communities, our communities strengthen. They offer newness of life. In moments of grace, we understand that it is God who creates and sustains us, and we are freed.

The challenge of community life, then, is to risk together

disarming our individual hearts, and creating a circle of disarmed hearts that grows wider and wider and slowly widens to welcome the world.

Each of us can create a community of peace around us. Our families can be communities of nonviolent love, if we take care to honor, respect, and serve one another. The workplace can become a community, if each person strives to show kindness and respect to one another. The university or hospital or any other institution can become a community of peace and service, if people strive intentionally to create a human atmosphere of peace and service. But each of us needs to build a community. And if we want to pursue the life of faith all our days, we will find it helpful in the long run to join a local faith community in our church or synagogue or mosque, so that we have friends to pray with, share our journey, and help us to sustain our faith during the times of struggle and doubt. As we deepen our love for all the members of our various communities, we create a "community of the heart," as Henri Nouwen described it, that we take with us into God's community.

The whole world benefits from the peace created in community. Communities touch communities that touch other communities around the world, creating a global community of peace.

We cannot live without one another. By living and work-

ing together, we can experience not only the fullness of life, but the gift of God's peace among us. Life in community leads to peace. All those who seek the fullness of peace will want to experiment with community life. From my own experience, I know they will ultimately not be disappointed.