

JOHN DEAR

PRAISE BE
Peace

Psalms of Peace and
Nonviolence in a Time of
War and Climate Change



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INTRODUCTION

Driving north along California's Highway One from my little hermitage beside the Pacific Ocean near the village of Harmony to Big Sur and its mountaintop New Camaldoli monastery, I feel a lightness of spirit amid the breathtaking scenery and the fresh ocean air. The vastness of the blue ocean, the shocking mountain cliffs, the mysterious rocky coast and sandy beaches, and the array of creatures—the sea gulls, otters, curlews, dolphins, elephant seals, whales, Stellar Jays, egrets, blue herons, and even the ten-foot-long, prehistoric-looking condors—they toss away all worries and open a new liminal space. Suddenly you find yourself in the best of God's creation. Then almost without knowing it, you start longing for and looking for the Creator of such peace.

Big Sur has long been a refuge for seekers and mystics. Thomas Merton traveled up this road shortly before flying off to Asia and his death. Joan Baez lived along this coast for years, and still lives just north. Writers, poets, artists, and spiritually minded people dwell hidden away along the mountain, while some four million people drive this magical coastal road each year.

I've been coming here for over thirty years to visit the Catholic mon-

astery on the top of the mountain. It's a difficult journey, one I take with a mixture of excitement and trepidation as I approach the steep cliff road. After Rocky Ridge and Limekiln, you come to the new road built after part of the mountain collapsed into the ocean in 2017. Then just before Lucia, you turn right onto a one-lane dirt road and start the hair-raising, life-threatening, cliff-hanging two mile zig-zag up the mountainside, tacking back and forth, until you come to the church, bookstore, guest rooms, and hermitages.

The drive up the mountain terrifies me because it's only one lane with no guard rails. The "road"—if you can call it that—continues to deteriorate, slowly slipping down the mountain, despite the repairs made every few months. But once on top, the vista catches your breath. You look out over the vast ocean, the miles of trees and tall grasses, down the mountain cliffs, and take a bird's-eye view of God's creation.

As you enter the old cinderblock chapel, Rublev's gentle icon of the Trinity seated around a table greets you. The white-robed monks are just gathering for one of their daily prayer vigils. They stand, face one another, and begin. "O God, come to my assistance," one chants. "O Lord, make haste to help me," they all respond.

At every prayer time, whether lauds or vigils, Mass or vespers, they turn to the psalms. In this way, they keep alive a two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition of prayer and song centered on these holy, ancient Jewish texts.



Thomas Merton held a romantic dream of the Camaldolese life. In the 1950s, he begged to leave his Trappist monastery of Gethsemani and join the Camaldolese, where each monk lives in silence and solitude, with his own private hermitage and garden, each close to the church where together they gather for daily prayer and Mass. Merton never left Gethsemani, but the Camaldolese way pushed him deeper into solitude

and, eventually, to his own hermitage in the woods where he cultivated silence, peace, and grace.

St. Romuald founded the great monastery of Camaldoli in Tuscany under the Benedictine Rule over a thousand years ago. Only one text from St. Romuald survives, his “Little Rule”:

Sit in your cell as in paradise ... Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish. The path you must follow is in the psalms—never leave it. If you have just come to the monastery, and in spite of your good will you cannot accomplish what you want, then take every opportunity you can to sing the psalms in your heart and to understand them with your mind. And if your mind wanders as you read, do not give up. Hurry back and apply your mind to the words once more. Realize above all that you are in God’s presence, and stand there. Empty yourself completely and sit waiting, content with the grace of God, like the chick who tastes nothing and eats nothing but what his mother brings him.

“Realize above all that you are in God’s presence,” Romuald writes, “and stand there.” Be “content with the grace of God.” Use the psalms as your daily text. For a thousand years, monks from St. Romuald to Thomas Merton have sat in that grace, emptied themselves into peace, chanted the psalms, and waited upon God. They not only walk the path to peace; they live the life of peace.



They say Jesus prayed the psalms regularly. He may have even known them by heart. If so, that’s where he learned fearless devotion, dedicated truth, and total dependence on God. If you learn the psalms by heart, you set your heart and mind on God and God alone. For you, there is only God. For the rest of your life, there is only God. With

God, comes love, mercy, generosity, kindness, faithfulness, security, and peace toward yourself, your neighbor, all humanity, and all creation. In the psalms you hear the divine call to serve and liberate the poor and oppressed and establish universal peace with justice for every human being and all creation.

Jesus was meticulously nonviolent, so he must have brought to the psalms his own wisdom of nonviolence. The gospels begin with the story of Jesus' encounter with God after he was baptized at the Jordan River, where he heard in a moment of prayer a gentle loving God call him "My beloved." In that moment, Jesus knew God as loving, compassionate, and nonviolent. After that, he set forth on the gospel journey to invite everyone to welcome God's reign of peace and nonviolence here on earth. He stood up publicly and denounced the ways of empire and injustice and was crucified by the powers-that-be for his divine nonviolence and civil disobedience, but in his resurrection spirit, his campaign of nonviolence lives on.

The best way, then, to read the psalms is through the eyes of the nonviolent, compassionate Jesus, from a Gandhian/Kingian perspective of nonviolence, through the lens of the key gospel teachings—the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. If we read the psalms from Jesus' vision of nonviolence, we will find new strength to turn away from hate and anger toward greater trust and devotion to God and new-found wisdom, gratitude, and wonder.

Reading the psalms as Jesus read them can help us become more faithful, more devout, more fearless, more secure, more loving, more trusting, and more nonviolent. We learn not to place our trust in weapons or violence, not to act arrogantly or unjustly, not to doubt or test God. Instead, like Jesus, we will learn anew to place our security more and more in our gentle, loving God and discover the God of peace as our rock, our strength, our hope, our fortress, our security, and our protection. As we follow the nonviolent Jesus who prayed through the

psalms, we learn to stand in faith, hope, and love, unarmed, vulnerable, nonviolent, our eyes focused on God, our hearts transformed like the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and our souls open to creation and the glories of heaven.

If we read the psalms from the perspective of gospel nonviolence, as Jesus advocates in the Sermon on the Mount, then these prayers take on new life. They make more sense. They lead us out of our inner violence into the spirit of peace, out of the culture of violence into a new culture of nonviolence, out of the world of death into the fullness of life in God.

They become just what we need.



The psalms are one hundred and fifty ancient prayers, about half of them attributed to David, evoking every emotion, from devotion and praise to anger and hatred, from vengeance and violence, despair and dread, to peace and glory. Many are liturgical prayers intended for the leader of a Jewish faith community. Some are hymns of praise. Others offer thanksgiving. Many are individual or communal lamentations. Fundamentally, they are an ancient cry to God, and as such, they are as relevant today as ever.

With sisters and brothers of old, we, too, cry out to God for help and protection, for security and comfort, for justice and peace. We, too, wrestle with both our faith and our emotions in our daily struggles, fears, crises, and breakdowns, as we endure the world's permanent wars, racism and sexism, corporate greed, killings, systemic injustice, and environmental destruction. Like the nonviolent Jesus, we strive to be compassionate and nonviolent, to do our part to bring justice and peace, and to make the world decent and sane.

For two thousand years, Christians have read the psalms as a basic form of prayer. Priests, nuns, and members of religious orders in partic-

ular still read them every single day. They unite the prayer of the global church in a cry for help, a hymn of praise, and a pledge of trust. But for some seventeen hundred years, we Christians have neglected the non-violence of Jesus, and so we have often been misled by the violence in the psalms and other texts to believe in a false god of violence.

Jesus brought his extraordinary vision of universal love, boundless compassion, and total nonviolence to every person, every moment, every situation in life—and so, I presume, even to the Scriptures. He announced that he was the fullness of the law and the prophets, that his understanding of God reached beyond our limited understanding to behold a nonviolent God, a God who does not hate, does not kill, does not want us to suffer injustice. The God of the nonviolent Jesus is a God of unconditional, nonviolent, all-encompassing, all-embracing, all-inclusive universal love and peace. As he prayed through the psalms, Jesus must have found encouragement, strength, and hope to go forward and be faithful to who he was—the beloved of God, sent to proclaim God’s reign of peace.

His was a daily life-and-death struggle to resist the culture of violence and propose an entirely new world of nonviolence, which he called “the reign of God at hand.” The psalms were his prayer book, so they must have helped him fulfill his mission, trust in God no matter what, endure risk and misunderstanding with patience and faith, and lay down his life for God and humanity in a spirit of loving nonviolence. If that is the Christian calling—to follow Jesus on his public campaign of nonviolence—then the psalms can help us too as we try to carry our own public campaigns of creative nonviolence for justice and creation.



Alas, some verses in the psalms clearly espouse violence and uphold a violent god as if violence were a sacred, religious duty. “Blessed are those who seize your children and smash them against a rock,” we read

(137:9). “God will crush the skulls of the enemy” (68:22). “Slay my enemies, God” (59:12). “March with our armies, God” (108:12).

I suggest the time has come to drop these verses from our prayer, to reject any biblical call to violence, and to adhere only to those texts that help us become people of loving nonviolence, like Jesus. Of course, I’m not the only one who thinks this.

Shortly before he died, legendary Benedictine monk and interfaith leader Bede Griffiths wrote a book about the psalms where he announced that after a lifetime of praying the psalms every single day, he now realized that some verses should no longer be recited by Christians. We Christians are summoned to be as nonviolent as Christ, he argued, and so we need to avoid anything and everything that promotes violence, including scriptural texts calling for violence and war. Bede Griffiths was one of the first major religious figures in modern history to make this bold suggestion, and I think we should take his advice to heart:

It has become more and more difficult to accept many of the Psalms as Christian prayers. Taken in their literal sense many of the Psalms express feelings of anger, hatred and revenge against one’s enemies which are entirely opposed to the teaching of the gospel on love of one’s enemies. ... It has become urgent, therefore, to revise the Psalter, so that all branding of others as “enemies,” “wicked” and “sinners” deserving no mercy or pity, should be removed. When one considers the incalculable harm which has resulted from this habit of mind in the Church, as seen in the Inquisition, the Crusades, the wars of religion and the persecution of “heretics,” it is clear that a revision of this kind is urgently needed. (Bede Griffiths, *Psalms for Christian Prayer*, Harper Collins, 1995, vii–x)

Bede Griffiths makes the case that Christians who love the psalms need to remember the nonviolence of Jesus and adhere to the boundaries of nonviolence, even in the way we pray and understand God.



At the monastery in Big Sur, when the monks chant the psalms, one of them sings the first line, and then the others join in. “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,” they sing. My friend the prior tells me that when they start singing the psalms, he enters a dream. It’s as if, for him, the psalms are a door into the Cloud of Unknowing, into the Mystery of the Divine, into the Holy Spirit. He lets the psalms wash over him, through him, and under him so that he finds himself “content in grace,” in the peace of God, waiting, hoping, looking, loving, and being. For the monks, these prayers are the doorway to the fullness of life and grace.

In this book, I offer reflections on various key psalms from the perspective of gospel nonviolence so that you too might find new strength from these ancient prayers to follow the nonviolent Jesus more and more on the path of peace and to be content in grace. May these pages encourage you on your journey and lead you to even greater blessings of peace.

J.D.

Big Sur, California

I

Seek Peace and Pursue It

THE CALLING OF
THE PEACEMAKER

*Trust in the God of peace and do good
that you may dwell in the land and live secure.*

*Take delight in the God of peace
who will give you your heart's desire . . .*

Those at peace with God have a future.

PSALM 37

1 Seek Peace and Pursue It

PSALM 34

*Come, children, listen to me. I will teach you awe
of the God of peace.*

Who among you loves life, takes delight in prosperous days?

Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking lies.

Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

In the early 1980s, I started a correspondence with someone on Georgia's death row. When he was nineteen, he robbed a liquor store late one night because he had no money. He panicked and shot and killed the elderly store owner. He immediately fell to the ground, wept over what he had done, repented of his action, and asked the man's family to forgive him. They did, but he went on to spend many years on death row. On at least three occasions, he came within a few hours of execution.

We became friends, and so, after a few years, I flew to Georgia and spent a day visiting him on death row. Then, in July 1990, a week before he was scheduled to be executed, he sent a message asking me to accompany him and to be there with him as he was killed. I agreed and flew to Georgia. With two other friends, we organized a series of public prayer vigils and, the day before his scheduled execution, attended the public hearing of the Georgia Board of Pardon and Paroles. There, the victim's family pleaded for my friend's life, and so, for the first time in Georgia's history, the Board granted clemency. A month later, my friend was released from prison. Today, he is happily married with children and serves as a minister in a church in Georgia. We remain friends.

Years before, though, our correspondence had a rocky start. I was a brash young whippersnapper, quite full of myself, arrogant and pompous. I wanted to support someone on death row and was given his address.

I wrote him condescendingly, saying in effect, “I’m a very busy person, have many difficulties with graduate school and peace activism, but I wanted to offer you my support.” He wrote back immediately to thank me for my letter and said right at the start: “I’m fine. My life is under the complete control of our Lord Jesus. You, on the other hand, sound like you’re a mess. Maybe I should be the one to support you. How can I help you?”

I was stunned. I wrote right back, denying my need for help, but he answered saying that it was obvious who the person in need was. And so, for nearly a decade, he wrote almost weekly advising me, encouraging me, and praying for me. He urged me to place my life in God’s hands and not to worry or be anxious or fearful. He said that he learned this profound level of trust in God by praying through Psalm 34 every day on death row.

And so, we begin with Psalm 34, since it was taught to me at an early age by my friend and teacher and became one of the first psalms to take root in me. It reads like a hymn of praise, a guide to daily living, an invitation to wisdom, as well as a testimony to God’s liberation of the poor and oppressed. In these turbulent times, it can help us surrender more and more to the God of peace and find deeper inner peace, come what may.



The first part of Psalm 34 is an invitation to join in permanent praise for the God of peace:

*I will bless the God of peace at all times;
God’s praise shall be always in my mouth.
My soul will glory in the God of peace that the poor
may hear and be glad.
Praise the God of peace with me.*

Psalm 34 sets a goal for our lives: spend every day of your life from now

on blessing the God of peace. We bless, praise, glorify, honor, and adore the God of peace and God's gift of peace. That means we do not honor war, hatred, revenge, resentments, domination, or empire. We honor and praise and worship the God whose name is Peace.

In order to praise the God of peace, we have to turn away from the culture of war and greed. The God of peace gets our full attention. As we seek God's peace, we start to side more and more with the poor, the marginalized, and the enemy, and we share God's peace with them by working for justice and disarmament. We learn that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, the peacemakers and justice-seekers, not the rich and the oppressor, the warmakers or injustice-makers. So we announce that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, on the side of peace and justice. In other words, as we surrender our hearts and lives to the God of peace, we open ourselves to the social, economic, and political implications of active peacemaking in the world. We try to embrace the whole human race with God, and that means we side with everyone in universal love, beginning with the poor, the marginalized, and the enemies of our nation.



The second part of the psalms testifies that God helps us in our time of need and urges us to call upon and rely on the God of peace:

*I sought the God of peace who answered me,
delivered me from all my fears....*

In my misfortune I called;

the God of peace heard and saved me from all distress....

Look to the God of peace that you may be radiant with joy.

Learn to savor how good the God of peace is.

Blessed are those who take refuge in God.

Those who seek the God of peace lack no good thing.

If we trust in the God of peace and turn to the God of peace in good times and in bad, God will help us, deliver us, and save us—that’s the message, the testimony, the promise. We’re told that God delivers all those who turn toward God, especially the poor, the oppressed, the brokenhearted and the crushed, which means all of us. That means, of course, that we too are called to be on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the brokenhearted, and the crushed. We are invited to recognize our own poverty, brokenness, and need for God. If we call upon God, God will help us.

If we call upon God regularly, we will discover God’s abiding care as a fundamental permanent gift, and we will rejoice and savor how beautiful the God of peace is, how kind and gentle, how loving to us all.

I like this word “savor.” Imagine savoring a delicious meal, a glass of fine wine, or a stunning sunset. Here, we’re invited to “savor” the goodness of the God of peace. As we take time to ponder and wonder over God’s goodness, we might notice the time and attention we give to savoring other things, such as bad news, disappointments, grudges, or the nation. Instead of savoring what is not good, we can discipline ourselves to savor what is good, most especially, the great goodness of the God of peace.

The more we ponder the goodness of God, the more we come to know God as goodness itself. God does not have a trace of evil, or mean-spiritedness, or war, or hatred. The act of savoring God’s goodness can heal our brokenness and help us reclaim our own inherent goodness, recenter ourselves in goodness, and live in goodness. We become do-gooders and share the goodness of God far and wide.



The third part lists the essential instructions on how to live well, how to be centered on the God of peace, how to love life and how to

take delight in good days. These instructions are worth studying and following:

*Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you awe
for the God of peace.*

Who among you loves life, takes delight in prosperous days?

Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking lies.

Depart from evil and do good.

Seek peace, and pursue it.

It is interesting to note that the first precept is *Do not speak evil or lies*. In other words, only speak goodness, kindness, truth, and love. Choose your words carefully, the psalmist instructs, so that you do not spread the culture's untruth, reinforce evil, and hurt others. Use words wisely, non-violently, mindfully, because words have the power to heal or destroy.

As we become more mindful about the words we use and the things we say, we notice what we talk about, and we choose to speak about the deeper things—the call to love, peace, and nonviolence, the need for justice and disarmament, the fate of Mother Earth and the creatures, the sufferings of the poor and oppressed, the glories of God. We talk about these good things and denounce the culture of violence and war; and in doing so, we lend our voices to the global grassroots movement of nonviolence working for a new culture of peace and nonviolence. As we speak the language of truth, peace, and goodness, we help spread nonviolence and encourage people everywhere to pursue a new world of truth, nonviolence, and peace.

Turn from evil and do good. This teaching is one of the fundamental tasks of the spiritual life—to turn from evil and do good. Every day, we're called to turn away from evil, to stop doing evil, to avoid evil, and from now on to do good. I would add St. Paul's addendum that we try to overcome evil with goodness. In other words, we do good, turn

from evil, and seek to transform evil into goodness through the power of nonviolent love, which is the heart and methodology of goodness.

As we hear this call to turn from evil and do good, we have to take stock of our hearts and lives and fearlessly examine our behavior to see how we do evil or good, and then take action so that we stop doing evil and do only the good. That may mean quitting an unjust job; leaving the military; renouncing the social sins of racism, sexism, and greed; getting rid of our guns; turning off the television; and cultivating peace and goodness as the priority of our lives. We want to stop any behavior that is violent toward ourselves, such as smoking or taking drugs; stop any violent behavior toward others, such as yelling at people or putting people down; and stop any participation in the culture of violence, such as owning guns or supporting war, so that our lives, which are good, publicly do the good. To do the good at the highest level, we have to join the various grassroots movements for justice, disarmament, and creation, to “organize goodness,” as Dr. King called it.

Seek peace and pursue it. Seeking peace and pursuing peace is another way to speak of the spiritual life, the lifelong pilgrimage to the God of peace. This is the meaning, purpose, and wisdom of life: to live at peace with oneself, to cultivate interior peace, to make peace with the God of peace; to live in peace with all peoples and all creatures; and even to seek peace with all nations, the whole human race, and Mother Earth.

As peace-seekers, we take time every day for peace, for the God of peace. That means we practice daily meditation as an ordinary part of our lives. In meditation, we sit quietly with ourselves, until we start to settle down into peace, into the God of peace, so that the God of peace can breathe through us, dwell within us, and use us. Meditation is the doorway to peace. For all seekers, it becomes an ordinary, essential ingredient in our lives. In our meditation, we learn to still the voices in our head, to rest in peace, to listen to the God of peace, and to breathe in peace.

To seek peace and pursue it means of course that we do not seek war or pursue war. That means we non-cooperate with every type of violence, every aspect of the culture of war. We do not cultivate war with ourselves, our spouses, our children, our relatives, our neighbors; with those who are different from us; with those who live in different lands, nations, or cultures. We do not make war upon the creatures or Mother Earth. We do not own, build, or support any weapons of violence or war. And we do not remain silent in the face of violence or war.

Our pursuit of peace includes a public stand for peace, which means we speak out publicly for disarmament, justice, the poor of the world, and Mother Earth. We do our part to support the global grassroots movements of peace, justice, and nonviolence, and so we do our little part to help end war, such as the ongoing US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Palestine. We work to end the big business of war, to abolish nuclear weapons, to eradicate hunger, poverty, and racism, which sow the seeds of war, and to stop environmental destruction.

The combination of these teachings leads us further along the path of nonviolence. Speak the truth, turn from evil, do good, and seek peace. Eventually, we learn to “speak, turn, do, and seek” all the time, so that every thought, word, and deed becomes an expression of peace, of the God of peace, and we become true peacemakers.



After urging us to turn from evil, seek peace, and pursue it, the fourth part of the psalm describes the nature of God, giving us a new fundamental understanding of God as the God of peace and justice and the spiritual basis for our work for peace and justice:

*The God of peace has eyes for the just and ears for their cry.
God's face is against evildoers to wipe out their memory
from the earth. When the just cry out,*

*the God of peace hears and rescues them from all their troubles.
The God of peace is close to the brokenhearted,
saves those whose spirit is crushed.
Many are the afflictions of the just, but the God of peace delivers
from them all.*

In the end, Psalm 34 summons us to serve the God of peace, bless the God of peace, trust the God of peace, and spend our lives turning away from evil and doing peace and goodness. It serves as a basic reminder for our spiritual lives, for how to be human, for how to go forward in peace and goodness in a world of war and evil.

“Blessed are those who take refuge in the God of peace,” Psalm 34 advises. With that blessing, we set our hearts and souls in the God of peace and reframe our lives to live always in the presence and practice of the God of peace.

2 Teach Us to Count Our Days Aright

PSALM 90

*Teach us to count our days,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Fill us at daybreak with your mercy,
that all our days we may sing for joy.*

I became aware of Psalm 90 in my early twenties. I noticed it’s urgent call, and it dogged me. I decided to hear its lesson: Life is short. Don’t waste your one precious life. Wake up, live wisely, spend your days in the service of God and humanity. Otherwise, before you know it, it will be over and you will find that you never lived.

Thinking about death when I was young, I noticed that no one

was ever able to avoid it. As far as I could tell, no one who ever lived did not at some point die. Despite this, few people ever talked about death, even though it surrounded us, what with the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and cancer. I was scared of death, but over the years I became familiar with it. I accompanied several people to their deaths, traveled extensively in war zones, knew people who were publicly assassinated or executed on death row, and even faced down death squads in El Salvador and elsewhere. I wanted to resist the forces of death but quickly learned that if you were going to spend your life resisting death, you better learn how to live life to the full.

It is astonishing how we go through life never talking about death, pretending we will not die, acting as if we will live forever. We think we are immortal. I don't think ignoring the reality of death helps. The culture of death wants to keep us ignorant about death so it can plow ahead with its global campaign of bringing good people to death through war, poverty, and violence. It hypnotizes us to go through life as sleepwalkers, unaware that our days are numbered, quietly supporting militarism, nationalism, consumerism, and materialism, and ignoring the early and unjust deaths of so many sisters and brothers.

The spiritual life faces the reality of life and death head on. It is life to the full, life lived in pursuit of the God of life, life lived so that all others might share the fullness of life, and therefore a life that non-cooperates with the forces of death. A fully human life understands its limits and chooses wisely, therefore, not to waste a single moment. It recognizes the reality of death and so lives life to the full by working to stop the forces of death killing so many others.

That's the call of Psalm 90. As I read the psalm from the perspective of the nonviolent Jesus, I ignore talk about God's wrath and focus on its reminder about the shortness of life and the challenge to live wisely and well:

*Our years come to an end like a sigh.
Seventy is the sum of our years,
or eighty, if we are strong;
most of them are toil and sorrow;
they pass quickly, and we are gone.*

At best, you might make it to eighty, the psalmist reminds us. You will work hard, know sorrow, then get sick and die. There is no way around this inevitable mysterious reality. At some point, your body will fail you and stop working. That is, if you don't die earlier from some disease or accident or violence.

Most of us numb ourselves to this truth. We drink, take drugs, and give in to addiction to anesthetize ourselves. Then one day we realize that time has flown by and illness and death are upon us. We ask why, we rage in anger, we sink into depression, and we complain in misery. The denial of death does not help us avoid it or undergo it well with grace, wisdom, and peace. It just keeps us anesthetized and so muddies the meaning, wonder, and potential of our one precious gift.

“Wake up!” Psalm 90 says. “Your one life is a precious gift! Live it wisely! Live every day to the full! Live for the God of peace, at peace with the God of peace, at peace with all humanity and creation!” To that end, it offers one of the key teachings of the Bible:

*Teach us to count our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Fill us at daybreak with your mercy,
that all our days we may sing for joy.
May the favor of the God of peace be upon us.*

Instead of ignoring life and death, Psalm 90 encourages us to pray for the grace to count our days aright, that is, to live wisely and attentively

every day of our lives, to be aware of the precious gift of life and to make the most of our lives as a gift to God and humanity, to treasure every moment with every human being in this Garden of Eden.

The psalmist wants us to receive the gift of “wisdom of heart,” a beautiful phrase that invites us to live fully with wise hearts, so that we might practice the wisdom of universal love, compassion, and nonviolence. With “wisdom of heart,” we practice daily mindfulness in the present moment. We try to live consciously in full awareness of the precious gift of life and, therefore, to serve others and make life beautiful and peaceful for others. If we cultivate wisdom of heart, we open our hearts in universal love, compassion, and nonviolence toward every human being, all creatures, and Mother Earth and surrender our lives to the God of peace. This pleases God and leads to new blessings for ourselves and others. We will be blessed with mercy and joy and find favor with God and creation. What a blessing!

3 **Teach Me Your Way, God of Peace**

PSALMS 86, 25

*Teach me your way, God of peace, that I may walk in your truth,
single-hearted and revering your name.*

Give strength to your servant.

The primary task for us as Christians is to follow the nonviolent Jesus on the path of peace. He is our way, our truth, our life, and our peace. But to follow the nonviolent Jesus along the Way, as the Way, we have to ask for the grace to learn his way, to know his way, and to walk his way. And then, as we embark on his way, we ask for the grace to remain on the way, to stay faithful to the way, to maintain the strength to walk the way for the rest of our lives.