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Based on the gospel for Sunday 19 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: Matthew 5:38-48

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Blockbuster movies, and our own sense of righteousness, often gives us an image of what a hero should be like. Faced with adversity, threatened with danger, we expect the hero to rise to the challenge, to fight back, to defeat the 'bad guy'. Responding to tragedies in the news, there is often a clamour of voices that favour “eye for an eye” as justified and appropriate.

Jesus is not that kind of hero. Revenge may be instinctive, but it is not the best way, the good way. In his own response, at his arrest and trial, Jesus shows restraint and silent dignity against a show of ego and injustice. Accusations of cowardice are simplistic. How would Jesus change hearts and minds, change the world, by simply taking on the role of aggressor?

The way of non-violence is far more in keeping with the Kingdom of God, living out human ideals and nurturing human dignity. Questioning what is right, being an example of a better way.

Recently Pope Francis made a 'pilgrimage of peace' to South Sudan. This was not the first time the Pope has called for an end to conflict in the country. In 2019 Pope Francis invited President Salva Kiir and other opposition leaders to the Vatican. An uneasy ceasefire had been in place since the previous September. In the Vatican, people who had fought one another prayed together instead. Pope Francis said: “I am asking you as a brother to stay in peace. I am asking you from my heart, let us go forward.” Pope Francis knelt and kissed the feet of the opposing leaders. Salva Kiir, later said that he “trembled” as Pope Francis knelt before him.

“To love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” is an act of courage. Internationally, nationally or personally, we are encouraged to be better, to be ‘the change’. To recognise that violence does not pay; revenge is not sweet.

God of forgiveness,
 give us hearts that are compassionate and forgiving.
 Make us agents of reconciliation and peace.
 Give us courage to make a difference,
 to bring justice and peace to all.
 Amen.



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Prayers for peace

In a world filled with violence and conflict, join us in praying for peace.

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South Sudan

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This reflection and prayer were written by CAFOD volunteer Mairie Gelling.



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