

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating March 28, 2021

Communications with the editor should be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto:j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com). Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

## Editorial

After the calendar, the Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for Palm Sunday. Tom Keene's poem is *Imagine*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is a letter to President Joseph Biden concerning the recent U.S. airstrikes in Syria; the letter questions just how pragmatic the tactic is.

## Calendar

**Tuesday March 23**, 9:00am-11:00am (10:00am-12:00pm ET), online "Advancing Integral Disarmament in Times of Pandemic," Cardinal Pietro Parolin (Vatican Secretary of State), Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson (Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), and Dan Plesch (University of London), among others. On Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuOKuJNsXd0>

**Tuesday March 23**, 10:00am (11:00am ET); **Wednesday March 24**, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET), **OR Thursday March 25**, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), film *The Third Harmony*, on nonviolence as a human resource. This is part of the Movies With Mercies film series. The 44 minute film will be followed by discussions in breakout groups. Register at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfMlhOO3I01R-P21Yh1ubuzFb-TCUkj1HlkDhrBa2N1kyDtA/viewform> .

**Wednesday March 24**, 2:30pm-4:00pm (3:30pm-5:00pm ET) online program on the anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, "A Confluence of Health and Science: Transformative Communities in Solidarity for Environmental Justice," Vince Miller (University of Dayton), Adrienne Hollis



**Wednesday April 7**, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET), "Walking with the Saints: My Writing Life," Robert Ellsberg (Orbis Press, formerly with the *Catholic Worker*). Register at [Fairfield.edu/cs](https://Fairfield.edu/cs)

**Sunday April 11**, 9:30am, online "Biodiversity Loss," including why it is important; Kerri Crawford (University of Houston). Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09#success>

**Wednesday April 14**, 2:30pm-4:00pm (3:30pm-5:00pm ET) online program "The Right to a Healthy Environment in the Americas," Rob Brodrick (The Partnership Center), Kwyn Townsend Riley (poet, Western Illinois University), Soledad Garcia Muñoz (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights). Register at: <https://udayton.edu/artssciences/ctr/hrc/romero/romero-21.php>

**Saturday April 24**, 12:00pm-4:00pm (1:00pm-5:00pm ET), online "Crating a Culture of Life in a Divided Country," Consistent Life Network. Register at: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFiWjfUNE\\_mQ8A9KOcYejVoURnte27Fh\\_-hazCrIYT\\_YBKZQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFiWjfUNE_mQ8A9KOcYejVoURnte27Fh_-hazCrIYT_YBKZQ/viewform)

**Monday April 26**, 6:30pm-7:30pm online "Becoming an Ally against racism," Lisa Stone (anti-Defamation League). Register by April 19 at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

### **In El Paso**

**Monday April 5-Saturday April 10**, 7:00am-3:00pm, redeem tickets for 3 red cheese enchiladas, beans, rice, and salad, at Martita's Lunch Box, 3623 Buckner (new location), in the annual Isaiah House fundraiser. \$10.00 per order. Call Ana Ramirez 915-494-4180 or Pat Delgado 915-740-3962 to arrange ticket purchases.

### **Notices**

**Earth Day 2021: Restore Our Common Home**, from Catholic Climate Covenant. This year's Earth Day program theme is "Restore Our Common Home", a theme that addresses how as people of faith we must urgently act to not only protect

but restore God's beautiful gift of creation. The one-hour educational and prayer program is the perfect way for our families, parishes, schools, and religious communities to prepare for the Vatican's launch of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform in May 2021 (during *Laudato Si'* Week). The program contains prayers, readings, discussion questions, a short video, and suggested activities. Download from: <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/earth-day?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=44444444-4444-4444-4444-444444444444&eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=8afae231-79e2-4284-97ac-cb8bb052abbe>

**Lenten resources with a Social Justice Focus**, from Maryknoll. Designed to be used virtually in a small group you can form with friends or family, or your parish small group (or your Pax Christi friends), or easy to use at home with those in your pod. Each week applies the Sunday scriptures, to an issue of global solidarity. <https://www.maryknoll.us/resources/mission-spirituality/lent-2021>

### **Second Reading (Philippians 2:6-11)**

This famous passage may be a pre-Pauline formulation that Paul quoted in his *Letter to the Philippians*. It is likely one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Christian statement of faith. It testifies to the authentic spirituality that Jesus modelled, one that rejects the worldly trappings of power and prestige. Set next to the narrative of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey rather than on a war horse, it contrasts the pomp that some clerics embrace as their preferred form of worship. Paul says to consider a mindset among ourselves what was also the one in that of the Messiah Jesus,

Who beginning in the form of God

Did not deem being equal to God something to seize upon,

But emptied himself, assuming the form of a slave,

By becoming a human likeness.

### **Third Reading (Mark 14:1-15:47)**

There are actually two gospel readings for Palm Sunday, both from the *Gospel of Mark*. The first is read at the beginning of mass, before the entry into

the church for the main liturgy (Mark 11:1-10). [Some celebrants may choose John 12:12-16 instead.] It contains allusions to the “minor” prophetic book *Zechariah*. Historically, Jesus may have re-enacted the prophecy to indicate the peaceful nature of his messiahship:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Lo, your king comes to you;

Triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass,

on a colt the foal of an ass.

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

And the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

And he shall command peace to the nations;

His dominion shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

The context of the passage has themes of war and conquest, creating a curious juxtaposition with the celebration of peace. The juxtaposition also characterizes Zechariah 14, which speaks of the Mount of Olives (14:4), which Mark’s passage also mentions. We can only take this as an exposition of mixed emotions on the part of Mark and Zechariah both—troubled anxiety and peaceful acceptance at the prospect of bringing divine peace to a troubled and troubling world, with the knowledge that the world would turn against the humble king riding a donkey colt.

Jesus seems to have had two followings—his band of Galileans and another group based in Jerusalem. Denominations evidently existed from the beginning of the Christian movement. The Jerusalem band pre-arranged an “upper room” which the evangelist associates with the Christian Eucharistic meal. The meal, described along with the crucifixion in the main gospel reading, has the familiar discourse of “this is my body” and “this is my blood,” prefiguring the drama to come, wherein the Messiah is both present and absented, imparting life and departing from life. Judas cannot endure the loss of what is valuable and who is valued, and joins the world of the apparent winners. Peter, a stand-in for “everyman” in the narrative, finds himself caught up in the cross currents.

There is no simple flight from the world in this religious expression; the Messiah goes right into Jerusalem. Nor is there an accommodation to the ways of

the world. Like a conscience, the Messiah neither stays clear nor forces compliance.

## Poem

### *Imagine*

Imagine,  
after a million years of ancestry we would walk on the moon.  
machines solving problems faster than brains,  
bulbs shedding light enough to veil our view of stars.

Imagine,  
a world economy where all eat well,  
where all support healthcare for all,  
where learning is free as air to breathe.

Tom Keene and the Muse

## **U.S. faith leaders send joint letter to President Biden on U.S. airstrikes in Syria<sup>1</sup>**

March 11, 2021

Greetings President Biden,

As people of faith, we have a deep sense of the sacred dignity of all people. We also have a clear conviction of our sacred call as human beings to seek all possible creative, nonviolent approaches to transform conflict and meet the needs for accountability.

We recognize you as a fellow person of faith, who seeks to live in accord with such ways of being. And we recognize that last week, just over a month since

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<sup>1</sup> Pax Christi USA signed onto this letter from faith leaders to President Biden in response to the recent U.S. airstrikes in Syria.

taking office, your team ordered the killing of other human beings (22 people killed), and thus, the traumatization of their families through military airstrikes, as well as contributing to regional instability. We are deeply disappointed and distraught by this choice of our President's team. We acknowledge the challenges of being in your position and the needs to be responsive, reliable, and to seek security. While we are deeply concerned with the loss of any life, we were encouraged by reports that you called off a second strike after reports of women and children were present. Yet, the human destruction and military strikes your team did unleash do not meet the needs to be responsive, reliable, and ensure security.

One of the main arguments for this human destruction is that it will "deter" and "de-escalate" future destructive action by Iran. This seems false. We have been going back and forth with attack and counterattack. Did deterrence and de-escalation happen after we killed the Iranian general in January 2020? Or, after the intensification of the Pentagon's naval and air exercises near Iran? Or, after the U.S. seizure of Iranian oil tankers? Or, after increasing economic sanctions? Rather, such human destruction creates trauma, bitterness, displacement, and the likely "blowback" that the CIA has named about such activity long ago. As Bennis and Peterson-Smith aptly stated about the claim of de-escalation, this is "pretty astonishing." And thus, less than a week after this most recent bombing we experience an air base hosting U.S. troops being bombed in retaliation.

Another argument for this human destruction is the claim of proportionality. Such an analysis is too narrow and vague. This action is more than just one action of destruction compared to another action of destruction. It is a pattern of behavior by both countries that has created and intensified an unhealthy, corrosive, and distrusting relationship. Such a relationship has led to enormous amounts of suffering, trauma, and death over the years. Simply calling this "proportional" misses the relevant moral aspects and functions to perpetuate the destructive conflict. One "proportional" act after another, and another, and another doesn't make it just, but makes it an "eye for an eye," and thus, a cycle of destructive conflict.

Instead, we need a broader more adequate moral analysis to determine strategy and action in such situations. We need to focus on norms that cultivate the habits and skills to engage conflict constructively, to break cycles of violence, and to build a more sustainable peace. Part of this is calling on you to do what you claimed about leading with diplomacy. Yet, there is much more than that. Another claim is that this human destruction was "necessary" for

“accountability.” The issue of accountability is a genuine need when harm occurs. Accountability is not about increasing harm, suffering, or death for others. That is retribution. That is what too much of our criminal justice system is about in the U.S., as many Black, indigenous and people of color will testify. Accountability is about enabling a process that makes it more likely the perpetrators increase understanding of the harm caused, grow in empathy for those harmed, acknowledge responsibility for the harm, and work with the stakeholders to repair the harm as much as possible. As part of a thorough, multilateral investigation into a particular attack or series of attacks, this is what we would do if we were about accountability. Such a process would include U.S. acknowledgement of harm as part of the broader pattern of behavior. As the just peace norms signal, there are many other nonviolent resistance options to shift the dynamic of this conflict.

It is not a coincidence that our Black, indigenous and people of color community in the U.S. suffers from this retributive focus in our criminal justice system, and that people in the Middle East, particularly Iran and Syria, have been consistently suffering from these retributive acts of human destruction. Our habits, policies, and institutions of systemic racism are a notable aspect of this reality. With your Administration’s commitment to addressing racial justice and equity, we ask you to apply that in foreign policy as well and shift away from these patterns.

As people of faith, we urge and pray that you will shift course. There is no time to waste on the old ways of human and ecological destruction. We can be better. President Biden, you can lead us in this direction.

Sincerely,

**Kyle Cristofalo**

Senior Director Advocacy, Government Relations  
Churches for Middle East Peace

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Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

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National Advocacy Center  
Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd  
U.S. Provinces

**Links**

Pax Christi International  
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.

<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

[www.msjc.net](http://www.msjc.net)

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

[www.txccedp.org](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio

[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change

[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)

Catholic Books Review

<http://catholicbooksreview.org>