These reflections were developed by two Secular Franciscans in the Atlantic area of the Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada, Doug Hagen and Sherrill Guimond. In a shorter form, they were presented at an Area meeting, and then, these texts became the basis for one of the retreats hosted by St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cornwall, PEI.

We are using the version of the Beatitudes found in Matt 5:1-12.

**Seventh Beatitude: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

This Beatitude stresses the way a Christian should relate to others.

Jesus does not say “Blessed are the peaceful”, but “Blessed are the peacemakers.” It is one thing to possess an inner peace and to rejoice in it. It is quite another and a much greater challenge to strive to make peace possible for others.

Peace is much more than the absence of open conflict. However, solving a conflict is often the preliminary step to real peace. Estrangement between family members, alienation of people in the same parish community, hostility among co-workers all provide ample opportunity for the peacemaker.

While efforts to promote peace between individuals and small groups are important, we cannot ignore our responsibility for world peace. Given the level of nuclear arms, our very existence depends on it.

Rather than bemoaning the conflicts or becoming depressed, we can use our energies in a positive way. We can pray daily for world peace.

Jesus spent a great deal of time telling people that His Kingdom was not of this world. Many of the people who listened to this sermon expected a military kingdom. Jesus would defeat the Romans. In John, Ch. 6, after the great miracle that he had performed, it says that they would have made Him king (feeding of the 5,000).

But Jesus would be King of their hearts. His Kingdom would be in their hearts.

Some of the Beatitudes seem to highlight the inner attitudes of the disciple. Others stress the way we are to relate to others. This one is definitely in the second group.

Something else that Christ did not say was: “Blessed are those who prefer peace, wish for peace, await peace, love peace or praise peace.” His blessing is on the makers of peace. A peacemaker bridges the gap that separates people from one another and reunites them through love and friendship.

* A peacemaker is compassionate. Orphanages in war-torn countries have children who are dying, not so much from lack of food as from lack of love.
* A peacemaker is courageous – where there is darkness, the peacemaker is light. Where there is hate, the peacemaker is love. Where there is injustice, the peacemaker is justice.
  + Bishop Desmond Tutu, the black Anglican Bishop of South Africa and winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, is such a man. He courageously risked arrest for treason by calling on the international community to apply sanctions against the white minority government of South Africa in the hope that this action might lead them to change their dehumanizing treatment of blacks. It took the courageous touch of the peacemaker to establish justice in the land.
  + A peacemaker is caring.
    - Dr. David MacDonald, Canada’s former Famine Relief Co-ordinator in Africa, has been a caring peacemaker to the starving. He badgered governments into giving more money. He eliminated bureaucratic roadblocks. He eased the conflict between various aid groups by engineering plans agreeable and acceptable to all. It takes the caring touch of a peacemaker to challenge us to turn our caring into sharing.

The world slaps various labels on the peacemaker, not all of them complimentary. Peacemakers have been called sentimentalists, idealists, troublemakers, cowards, traitors, commies, black lovers and so on. But God calls them his children and the name God gives them is the only one that really matters or counts.

No Spirit has been more identified with the Beatitude of peacemaking than Francis of Assisi.

His life began to change course after a year long imprisonment following a battle with the neighbouring town of Perugia in 1202. At 20 years of age, he was lucky not to have been maimed or killed. He had imagined how glorious it would be to be a man of arms. He was attractive, ambitious, popular and a walking billboard for his father’s work.

Then he saw the reality of war. He saw beautiful faces turned into hideous masks, same minds twisted into madness. We all know the conversion that took place.

Francis only lived to see his early 40’s but in his short life he let us with a treasure chest of stories about what can happen when one tries with every fibre of his being to live the peace of Christ in the face of the world’s violence.

Sister Rosemary Lynch, a Franciscan sister and peacemaker says: “Even if nuclear bombs were abolished, unless we defuse the bomb in our own hearts, the human family is quite capable of finding other, even worse means of destroying life.”

In Admonition #27, Francis speaks of charity, wisdom and peace. He encountered the God of peace in the crucified Christ because he encountered the God of compassionate love. Love that is given, received and shared requires a community of people who are united in love. The Admonition also talks of poverty and joy. Francis lived in poverty so that he could overcome his violent self and become a loving person. He recognized his need for God and also that this spirit of love cannot take root in a heart that is possessed by other things, such as anger, hurt, jealousy or material possessions. Only a heart turned towards God could freely welcome the spirit of love and provide room within for peacemaking. So we are asked even, admonished, not so much to speak of Christ as to let Christ live in us so that people may find Him by seeing and feeling how He lives in us.

Father Benet Fonck writes that peace and all good is a marriage of the divine and the human. It is a statement of the ideals we are to take with us into the market places of the world. It stems from the awareness of the all-pervading presence of God, the soul of all goodness, sanctity, virtue, perfection. It is awareness that should inspire us at all times to give witness to Emmanuel , God with us; it is an awareness and witness to the goodness of God that we must have ourselves before we can communicate it to others.

Addendum

The word “Blessed” is used in the Beatitudes. Jim Forest says that there is no one word which will adequately describe the word, Blessed. It is something like “on the right path,” and “on the way that the Creator want us to go.” We Franciscans offer to each other the blessing “Pax et Bonum”. – Peace and all good. We ask that God grant the grace and strength to be all that we can be, all that we are called to be, and have all of the grace that God wishes to bestow on each of us. The Blessing of St. Francis to his dear companion, Brother Leo, begins with the words: “May God bless you and keep you…..” As I look around the people in this gathering, I can see that God already has and continues to do so. I know with all my heart that you are blessed. We are not perfect but the good news is that perfect is not on the list. The blessed know their need for God; they are sorry for their sins; they humbly ask for help; they want to do what is right; they help others; they are honest, and they make peace; and that, my dear, dear friends is you.