



# Homily Notes

## Peace in Sudan

**Background:** As part of [Catholics Confront Global Poverty](#), Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops invite Catholics in the United States to pray, learn, advocate and give in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Sudan during the 101 Days of Prayer for a Peaceful Referendum in Southern Sudan, which end January 1, 2011. These homily notes are available for use by priests in the United States to help parishioners join in prayer and action during Advent. Homily notes are available for Nov. 28, Dec. 5 and Dec. 12 in order to provide several options for integrating this concern into a homily. You may wish to make available beforehand, or in the bulletin, the [Advent 2010 resource](#), which highlights Sudan as one part of the world in need of God's peace during Advent.

### Homily Notes for Clergy

#### November 28

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent, 2010

Isaiah 2: 1–5; Psalm 122: 1–9; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24: 37–44

Welcome to Advent. Today we begin a new Church year. This is Year A in the three-year cycle.

The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word meaning “coming”. What “coming” are we talking about? As we approach Christmas, we are preparing to welcome the coming of God among us as a human being, when Jesus was born in the stable at Bethlehem, making possible our salvation.

It is important for us to remember this great past event, and also to reflect on why it happened and how it affects our lives here and now.

At this time, we also remember another coming—the final coming when Jesus will come as King and Lord and invite all who have been faithful to eternal life. In this way, Advent is also a reminder of the need for us to prepare for that Second Coming and to be ready to welcome Jesus whenever he comes.

Earlier in chapter 24 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus predicts the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, which will occur at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D. When the New Testament speaks of the “new Temple of the Lord,” this “Temple” is the human body of Jesus—the incarnation of the Son of God who came to live among us as one of us. The everlasting Temple is not the massive building

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017  
[globalpoverty@usccb.org](mailto:globalpoverty@usccb.org)

Catholic Relief Services  
228 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201  
[globalpoverty@crs.org](mailto:globalpoverty@crs.org)

[www.peaceinsudan.org](http://www.peaceinsudan.org) • 1-866-608-5978

in Jerusalem, but the tiny Baby in his Mother's arms in the poverty of the stable. It is from this Temple that we learn God's ways and learn to walk in God's paths.

Today's Gospel includes warnings about the end times and about being ready for them. The reading helps us to remember that the celebration of Christmas is not just a reminder of the birth of Christ, but also a reminder of what this birth is ultimately about. Where are we going in life? Are we living as if God is with us now, as the name Emmanuel reminds us? What is our ultimate goal? It is not a question of looking back but looking forward. It is a question of being ready.

So, during Advent, we are remembering what happened in the past (Christ's birth), to think about how we must look to the future.

One concrete example of how people of faith can change the futures of our poor and vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world is the work of Catholic Relief Services, which is the official international humanitarian and human development organization of the Catholic Church in the United States. CRS and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops are working on an initiative called Catholics Confront Global Poverty.

[Raise your hand here] How many people know what is taking place in Sudan on January 9<sup>th</sup>? Just weeks away, a major event is taking place. Sudan and its people are in dire need of our prayers and support!

Southern Sudan will vote on whether remain united or secede from the rest of the country on January 9<sup>th</sup>. The fear is that this could develop into a conflict that would make Darfur or Rwanda look manageable in scope. Sudan is the largest country in Africa, and 9 other countries border it and could also be pulled into conflict. In Sudan's last civil war, which just ended 5 years ago, it is estimated that over 2 million people died. CRS is investing in peace right now, trying to stop a major disaster *before* it happens. CRS learned from what happened in Rwanda where an estimated 800,000 people died in 100 days. And CRS and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops are working *now* to prevent another situation like this from happening again.

Today we open our hearts to the season of Advent, to the 'coming'. We pray to make peace happen. We prepare to accept peace, to make a place for the 'coming' of the peace and the Prince of Peace.

I want to share with you a reflection on Forgiveness. It comes from a booklet called, Change Your Heart-Change the World: Reflections for 101 Days of Prayer for Sudan created in support of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference to be used by individuals, families and communities of faith in Sudan and around the world to foster a peaceful referendum in Sudan. Today's reflection focuses on healing and reconciliation. As you listen, think about the people of Sudan and your desires and prayers for our brothers and sisters seeking peace. This reflection is also about your own life, your own community and how you can be a vehicle for restorative justice and peace locally.

## **Forgiveness**

When we have been hurt by another, it can be very difficult to come to terms with the woundedness we feel. But by accepting and embracing our own wounds we open a door to forgiveness and new life. Too often people hoard grudges in their hearts which eventually affect their development of

healthy human relationships. One of the most important skills we each need is that of knowing how to forgive.

There is an African proverb which states: "He who forgives ends the quarrel." Forgiveness is far better than revenge. Forgiveness builds us up and helps us move on; whereas revenge destroys and creates bitterness. Forgiving helps us to heal our own wounds. Some people consider those who forgive to be weak or to be cowards or stupid. But there is much wisdom in the English proverb: "The noblest vengeance is to forgive" The gospels (Mt. 18:21-35) tell us that God is always ready and willing to forgive, even the most serious faults of people. Now, if this is the behavior of our God, we do not have any pretext to deny anyone our forgiveness. The parable of the prodigal son reveals explicitly God's desire to restore a loving relationship with people. By forgiving us our faults God empowers us to become like Him (Mt. 5: 48). Jean Paul Richter wrote the insightful words: "Humanity is never so beautiful as when praying for forgiveness or else forgiving another."

When we forgive we are imitating our loving God. When we "change our hearts" and forgive, we change ourselves and we 'change our world' for the better.

This is how we translate the life and message of Jesus into our daily lives. Our situation in Sudan invites us to this change of heart if we want a changed world. Hence, we are invited to be courageous enough to break down the walls (cultural, social, political, religious, psychological, and economical) that hinder us to forgive ourselves and others and hence reconcile for the building of a just and peaceful society.

Louis Okot, MCCJ

Take a moment to consider: what does this reflection mean for you? How might it shape your prayers for Sudan? During this Advent, you can pray, learn, and share the stories of those in need, like your brothers and sisters in Sudan. You can advocate on behalf of those who have no voice, and you give of your gifts. Whether you give time, talent, or treasure, all are needed. You can find out more at [peaceinsudan.org](http://peaceinsudan.org). See the [insert in today's bulletin](#).

Welcome to Advent!