

Make Me a channel
of your peace
(Sebastian Temple)

The prayer of St Francis, by Sebastian Temple: a prayer for everyone, and a prayer that, if sincerely said and meant by everyone, would surely change the face of the earth. But the face of the earth gets changed, most often, by war, conquest and violence: and they leave a legacy. Today, after 30 years, the fighting with guns and other destructive weapons in Vietnam is over. Will the people of that country who have suffered and been scarred so much, now have peace and reconciliation? — a true peace which is much more than an absence of war, a true reconciliation in which there is forgiveness and a genuine brotherhood of common interest for the total good of everyone. In the aftermath of war, there will of course be a lot of talk about 'why' and 'how' and 'if': and before long Vietnam will have disappeared from the front-pages and the news headlines: will its people disappear so soon too from our prayers? Whatever way you think, politically, and however you have reacted personally to the recent events in Indochina, let us pray together today for the people of that region and those countries. May the official ending of fighting be the beginning of true peace and reconciliation, that suffering and oppression at the hands of fellow-countrymen may cease. Let us pray for all those who have been killed and wounded in fighting: for those who have killed others: for families broken up by the war, for children left without father or mother, for parents who've seen their children killed, maimed and deprived. Let us pray for those who in any way have power over their fellowmen, that they may be inspired to honour and respect their brothers and not use their power (as power is so often used, everywhere) to oppress,

deprive, diminish human life in its fullness: or to destroy. As we thank God that a war is finished, let us not forget the human frailties, imperfections, lack of understanding that causes wars and that don't suddenly cease when there's a military cease-fire. The scars on the human soul remain: and we are part of that same brotherhood of mankind that suffers and is scarred. Perhaps for various reasons we won't be learning too much in the future about the people of Vietnam: let us not forget them in silence who are our brothers in the family of God. May all of us learn a little more (as mankind seems so slow to learn the lessons of its own folly and selfishness) — that there may not be war among peoples: this is a dream or aspiration which follows the end of every war, it seems, yet we haven't seen the end of violence on the earth — can we do so? The same folly, it seems, will be repeated again, in different ways, at different times, in different places... what can we do? Has the love of God any power to change the world, to change men's hearts? What if all who call themselves Christians were men and women of true peace, love, reconciliation? Would that banish the power of evil in our world? At least, as we pray today, let us be something more of what Christ wants us to be, and do whatever we can to oppose enmity, greed and injustice wherever we find them in the course of our lives and in our own lives. As we pray, let us be honest with ourselves, and with God who sees our secret thoughts — Lord, have mercy on us, for we need your forgiveness as we pray for the forgiveness of others: we need your peace as we pray for peace for our brothers. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace: *St Agnus Dei from Duruffe's "Nesse 'Cin Tablo'"*

Lam. Bring your peace and love to all our hearts: open our eyes and make us see what we do to each other: open our minds to understand the meaning of your creation and the life you have given us, to understand the aspirations and needs of our fellowmen: open our hearts to accept you and others in a bond of unity and love which would join us together rather than keep us individually apart: open our lips to speak with others rather than about them in ignorance of who they are and what they feel and think: to speak to you in prayer, in gratitude and thanks, in humility to ask for what we need. Open our arms to welcome each other in friendship and peace: and keep before us the image of Christ your Son whose arms opened wide on a cross of death, to welcome us into a new fullness of life in His resurrection. When it is only the cross of contradiction that we seem able to see in our lives and the world around us, help us see Christ on that cross and learn that His defeat is His victory: that He is alive, leading us across the divisions of man and man, of mankind and God, to a unity of life and brotherhood and fullness of life through Him, with our Father. Amen