



## A Christmas Prayer

by Philip Berrigan

*Philip Berrigan wrote "A Christmas Prayer" in 1972 while serving time at the Federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut, for destroying draft records during the Vietnam War. Berrigan's prayer serves as a reminder that the sins of war and the arms trade continue to exist and shatter the lives of God's people and creation. Like Berrigan, let us refuse to be people of indifference in times of war and violence; instead, let us draw strength from the Lord of Justice and renew our commitment to work for an end to war and violence in our local, national, and global communities.*

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone...For the yoke that burdened them...You have smashed...For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned...For a child is born to us, a son is given us...They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful...which He confirms by judgment and justice, both now and forever" (Isaiah 2:7).

Lord, we walk in darkness, and our land is in gloom. As we struggle to welcome You, I am reminded of Thomas Merton's prayer: "I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me...Nor do I really know myself."

Lord, when David prayed, he questioned You. Let me do the same, for Merton's words fit me, as they do thousands of American Christians, anguished as myself.

Lord, what is the yoke that burdens us, that keeps us fearful and irascible? Is it jingoism? Whiteness? Property? Or is it simply unfaith? Smash our yoke.



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Lord, when will we burn the boots that tramped in battle, and the cloaks that rolled in blood? When will we stop pulverizing Vietnam, stop arms sales to the poor, stop engineering doomsday weapons? War is death to others, spiritual death to us. **Be life to us.**

Lord, Isaiah called You Wonder-Counselor, peerless in Your wisdom and prudence. Why does our wisdom trade peace for comfort, why does our prudence oppress the weak? **Convert us to true wisdom and prudence.**

Lord, You are God-Hero: in You God and humanity met. Why do we fear You in ourselves; why do we shrink from Your summons to others? Help us to see You in the suffering. Lord, You are Father-Forever, devoted irrevocably to people. Why do we abandon people to specialists and bureaucrats, or to the sluggish impersonality of the State? **Teach us compassion and service.**

You are the Prince of Peace, the embodiment of reconciliation. Why is inner peace so elusive to us, community so strange, nonviolence so foreign? Why do we enthrone ourselves; why do we idolize the State? **Give us Yourself; give us peace.**

Lord, Your judgment is upon us because we do not accept Your justice. You judge us through the Vietnamese, through poor and black people, through our control of half of the world's wealth, through our sterile, unhappy lives. **Be justice to us.**

Lord, You stood up in the synagogue of Nazareth to apply the words of Isaiah to Yourself (and to us). "The Spirit of the Lord has been given me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor" (Luke 4: 18, 19; Isaiah 61: 1, 2).

Lord, why do we resist Your Spirit: why do we defile Your anointing? How can we announce Your good news to the poor when we don't believe it ourselves? How can we free captives when we are captive to delusion and indulgence? How can we free the downtrodden when our lives keep them downtrodden? How can we proclaim Your year of favor when we systematize war, bomb insanely, indict patriots, reward war criminals, jail resisters, reject amnesty, idolize power, and resist resistance as "self-righteous," "impractical," and "violent?"

Lord, will You help us to find room for You to banish the gloom and darkness in our hearts and in our land? "There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Lord, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves. So be it. **"Come Lord Jesus!"** (Revelation 22:20).

