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International Day of Peace

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Perhaps it was prescient. On Sept. 7, 2001, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution inviting all nations to honor a global cease-fire on Sept. 21 each year.

It was a fitting way to promote the UN's establishment of 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence. Four days later, an act of terrorism signaled an escalation of violent response worldwide. The UN objective to foster peace one day at a time slipped silently out of the headlines.

This year's observance focuses on individuals and their opportunities to promote peace one person at a time. This morning, Secretary-General Kofi Annan presents five United Nations Messengers of Peace - Muhammad Ali, Anna Cataldi, Michael Douglas, Jane Goodall, and Elie Wiesel. These celebrities will be linked by video conference to former child soldiers and other children affected by war.

Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of the observance is a 24-hour prayer vigil organized by a consortium of nongovernmental entities.

On Sunday, Sept. 21, prayer "for peace and nonviolence [is invited] in every house of worship and place of spiritual practice, by all religious and spiritually based groups and individuals, and by all men, women and children who seek peace in the world.

"This global 24-hour spiritual observation for peace is meant to demonstrate the power of prayer and other spiritual practices in promoting peace and preventing violent conflict" (www.idpvigil.com).

I've been considering how my prayers for peace can be more effective on this day and every day. Three thoughts have occurred to me so far.

First, I can stop telling God what to do. When Jesus prayed for a cessation of violence and to avert his own crucifixion, he ended his prayer, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." And then the Bible says that an angel appeared from heaven, strengthening him (Luke 22:42, 43).

This message didn't tell Jesus that violence was suddenly going to vanish. But the feeling of God's presence and care was so tangible that Jesus was comforted. Jesus did not become a victim of violence. Through his resurrection, he overcame the effort to silence him. This astonishing triumph demonstrated his victory over violence and earned him the title, the Prince of Peace.

In considering my own prayers for peace, too often I have my own agenda. But I'm reminded by Jesus' example that God's ways are infinitely above human conflict-resolution techniques. To bring a touch of divinity to my prayer, I need to quiet my own agenda. God has a plan for peace which can't be thwarted by human will, mine or anyone else's.

Second, I should pray for the prosperity of all. True peace isn't a win-lose situation. Victory without prosperity only clamps a lid on a still simmering pot of problems. Perhaps this is why the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, also means prosperity, health, safety.

It isn't enough for me to feel safe. Others need to feel prosperous and safe in order to stop acting out from envy or anger brought on by fear and lack of opportunity. As I pray for the prosperity of all, my sense of what peace is continues to morph. The needs of others are becoming of equal importance to my own concerns. I find myself praying for every individual to feel enriched by a spiritual prosperity. So that their relation

to God might feel closer and more rewarding. I try to acknowledge that God is directly inspiring every individual to do and be good.

Third, I'm praying not to be frustrated by detours in the peace process. Frustration derails prayer before it can reach its destination. Instead of being confident in God's guidance, we can allow disappointment and setbacks to stop prayer before it has a chance to take effect. It's like writing a correct answer on the whiteboard with one hand and erasing it with the other. No one else can see the right idea unless we have the courage to leave it written on the whiteboard of our hearts, and to express it in words and actions.

These three ideas help me in personal conflicts and help me pray more effectively for the world. This Sunday I plan on uniting with others to pray for peace. I'm confident that this prayer will bless me, as well as others.