

Assisi 15, September 2025

Peace and all good, dear family!

PRAYER – A powerful weapon for peace.

I share my thoughts here, not as a scientist, a clergyman, or an expert in any particular field, but as a simple Secular Franciscan who seeks peace and all goodness in the world, and is struggling to find a way to support your efforts here. While kneeling in prayer, I often ponder on the fact that throughout history, single individuals have changed its course – for better or for worse. But, it is also true that prayer has changed the behavior of individuals. As we come together here, our experts are working to find ways to change minds through the understanding of science and politics and reasonable dialogue. And many of us are trying to support the impact on the goal of nuclear disarmament through prayer.

ONE man over 2,000 years ago changed the world. He focused on love – love one another as you love yourselves – as I have loved you. This man died for us and resurrected from the dead, giving us hope and proving his divinity. He galvanized the world. Thousands were baptized in His name on that first Pentecost and the numbers grew exponentially through history. We were renewed and strengthened by his sacrifice and his message.

Over 800 years ago, another man, ONE man, motivated by the message of love given to him by Jesus Christ and this man's desire to walk in his footsteps, galvanized the church by responding to God's message: "Rebuild my Church." God gave him brothers and thousands gathered to fulfill this call. Today, there are few Christian believers who do not, at least, know the name of St. Francis of Assisi.

But not all respond to God's call for goodness. Barely 100 years ago, ONE man galvanized thousands of people and youth to another, more cynical path, a path in which approximately six million Jews were systematically murdered during World War II as part of the Holocaust. This genocide was carried out by Adolph Hitler and his collaborators. Today, we still feel the impact of this One man's greed, power and insane, evil intentions.

A few years later, in 1945, ONE other man made the decision to drop the first atomic bombs in Japan. The debate still lingers today – was this the way to end the second world war, or not?

I could list hundreds of individuals who, throughout the course of history, have caused dramatic movements and changes in our world and in our personal lives – some for the good and some for the not-so-good.

That number ONE keeps harassing me and is impacting how I pray and for whom I pray. Of course, I continue to pray for all sorts of causes, as we all do, including the peace efforts initiated in this very room. And they are all good, but I'd like to suggest that, perhaps, these prayers are too general, too watered down.

Most, if not all of us, believe that we can impact the process of the reduction of nuclear weapons by supporting the effort through prayer. So, I'd like to suggest that we make our prayer efforts even more strategic, more robust, more focused:

Each one of us, ONE man, ONE woman can take on the mantel as true prayer warriors, selecting ONE world leader who has the power to change the course of history. Can our prayer become more personal, more intense if it is focused – on ONE man, ONE purpose on the reduction of nuclear weapons, or one focused on reducing bombings and destruction -- laser-beamed directly into the soul of ONE individual to impact the decisions of that ONE leader, creating a legacy of hope and love rather than one of despair and destruction?

It would be helpful to get to know our prayer subject – his childhood, home-life, his struggles and successes. If possible, we should try to understand his desire for power, for greed, for attention. What makes him make decisions that hurt others?

There are many leaders who need our prayers, Putin, Trump, Xi... But as an example, let's consider Vladimir Putin. After all, he holds control of the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world - 5,459 nuclear warheads, with about 1,718 of them deployed and ready for use. To make the situation more tenuous, he is presently entangled in a war in the Ukraine and, apparently, although he has initiated conversations with Trump, death continues for Ukrainians and Russian soldiers. I'd say that he might be a good candidate for an intense prayer campaign...

Let's get to know him bit better: He was born in October 1952. He was probably baptized as a Russian Orthodox because he attends services there, usually twice a year. A student of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Lenin, and a member of the KGB. He came onto the national scene in 1996, and by the year 2000, he was elected president of Russia, alternately serving as President or Prime Minister up to the present time. During his tenure, he has been involved in the controversial annexation of Crimea in 2014, military interventions in Syria, and the present involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian War. He has no wife currently, but he was married to Lyudmila Shkrebnova from 1983 until their divorce in 2014. He has two daughters, Maria and Katerina, from that marriage, and there are rumors of additional children from other relationships.

While this is a brief overview of the man, we can better visualize him and who he is. Prayer for him now becomes more meaningful and purposeful. As individuals we can surely do that starting today.

But now, imagine all our prayer warriors coming together with ONE mission, ONE message, ONE specific time, focusing on ONE leader? Imagine visually the boosts of prayer energy laser-beamed into one individual's soul. Imagine 200,000 Secular Franciscans, hundreds ... thousands of other church groups and organizations. Imagine the prayer beams from around the world all focused on ONE decisionmaker. ONE person can change the world by his actions, but thousands praying for that ONE person could change the soul and mind of that ONE individual. I suggest we all say a quick prayer on October 7, Vladimir Putin's birthday -- that he be inspired to reject the horrors of war, consider the reduction of nuclear arms and accept peace. Let us begin this personal campaign, and send out an invitation on social media to all we know, to churches, organizations. As Francis said, "let us begin, for up to now we have done nothing." Each and every ONE of us can begin this campaign. We don't need to wait for someone to tell us what to do or say. A genuine plea with the love of the Lord should suffice. We can ask the Lord to open the soul of Putin so that he can hear our personal message. This is my prayer which can be directed to each of our leaders individually: Dear Lord, please open the soul of Vladimir so that he can hear me directly.... Vladimir, I pray that you open your heart, soul and mind to the beauty of life. I pray that you become a celebration of life and not a bearer death and destruction. Your life matters as does your soul. I pray that you let the goodness of Jesus Christ fill your heart and soul."

Let us remember that as experts in this room continue your work, we can, as laser-focused prayer warriors, support this journey toward world peace with our prayers -- prayers that will ultimately transition our nuclear weapons into nuclear energy that will power our world for peace and all goodness!

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