

March 1, 2015

Second Sunday in Lent

If God is for us, who can be against us?

War is not the answer. We are the answer. All of us. All of us who are weary of turmoil and conflict, who seek a world free of war and threats of war, who seek a society with equity and justice for all, who seek a community where every person's potential may be fulfilled, who seek an earth restored.

War is not the answer

Last Tuesday night, we held our first Soup Supper/Discussion after the 5:30 Mass on “Caring for our Earth Environment.” Part of that discussion led to what is happening in the Middle East. This was a very unsettling topic, something I would like to look at with you today. If we can’t talk about difficult issues in Church, where can we talk about it.

I read a couple articles this past week about what is happening there from the perspective of our Christian Faith - namely that justice and peace cannot be achieved by violence. I would like to share with you some of what they said.

First Article

The first article was written by Jim Wallis in the current issue of Sojourners magazine. It is called, “*Five Things to Know About ISIS and the Theology of Evil.*” He writes:

“As an evangelical theologian and pastor, I want to say that ISIS is evil. How we overcome this evil is a very complicated theological question. Here is what must keep in mind:

1. The conflict with ISIS cannot be framed as a ‘Holy War’. This is what ISIS most wants and is trying to provoke with their brutal cruelty. They are attempting to provoke a “holy war” with the U.S. as their primary enemy. ISIS wants to be seen as the sole defender of true Islam. The language of holy war only legitimizes ISIS and helps in their recruitment of more followers.
2. Our primarily military response to terrorism since 9/11 has made things worse. The world and our lives are less secure now because of previously failed military responses. The war in Iraq is a primary cause of ISIS. It destabilized that country and the region, re-fueled the Sunni/Shia sectarian conflict, revealed American practices and policies like torture and supporting oppressive regimes — all of which have accelerated deep grievances that are at the core of the ISIS ideology.

3. Only new political and economic solutions in the Middle East can transform the current state of affairs. A lasting solution will require the often-divided Middle East States themselves to take responsibility for their own region and for their own failures of governance — together. The United States must only assist them if they take responsibility for reasonable governance. We must be honest that the injustice and corruption of autocratic states in Muslim countries is a direct cause of ISIS, and our uncritical support for these governments must change. Beheadings in Saudi Arabia must be opposed as much as ISIS beheadings. These hypocrisies exist because of our thirst and addiction to oil, and are part of what leads to an ISIS.

4. Religious and political fundamentalism is best defeated from the inside. Fundamentalism cannot be bombed away from without, which just gives them new recruits. A global alliance between faith leaders and communities must be built to support responsible and courageous Muslim leaders whose teaching and practice must ultimately undermine lethal ISIS fundamentalism.

5. Addressing the roots of terror does not dismiss terror's evil and barbaric behavior. Whatever ISIS' beliefs may be, evil is never justified. But it's also true that terrorism is always built on grievances — real and perceived — that are used to perpetuate its ideology and violence. Addressing those grievances and correcting course along the way is essential to defeating terrorism.

Jim Wallis is not making this up. It is the Judaeo-Christian tradition going back over 2600 years ago, even before Isaiah: justice and peace are not achieved by violence.

Second Article

The second article was written by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese in the current issue of the National Catholic Reporter. It is entitled, "*Stopping the Islamic State without making matters worse.*" He writes:

"Much of the discussion of the Islamic State lacks nuance and a respect for the complexity of the political and religious situation. The focus has been on a military solution to the crisis. Some want to send in the U.S. military. Others, not wanting U.S. casualties, say we must train Iraqi troops to take on the Islamic State. It is a wonder that anyone can make these arguments with a straight face. The Iraqi army abandoned Mosul to an invasion of pickup trucks, and the Afghan army still cannot handle the Taliban.

"This does not mean that American soldiers are not dedicated and brave, it simply means that the military and civilian leadership in the Pentagon still calculates victory in terms of dead enemies and territory reclaimed. They continue to focus on winning battles while they lose the war. The cost has been thousands of U.S., Afghan, and Iraqi casualties, the alienation of the Muslim world, and billions of dollars blown up in futile attempts to kill every enemy.

“What can the U.S. do? The U.S. can help by increasing aid dramatically to those taking care of refugees from Syria and Iraq. It is a scandal that we are quick to spend money on arms but slow to care for the victims of war.

“The further expansion of the Islamic State must be stopped. But, as the Church has consistently taught, *‘the use of military force must be proportionate and discriminate, within the framework of international and humanitarian law.’*”

“The only people who can truly defeat the Islamic State are the Sunnis. But they will not take on the Islamic State if the result will be subjugation by a Shia-led national government. It will not be easy to win over the Sunni population again, they have been lied to too many times. No military solution will work that does not respect their legitimate aspirations for autonomy.”

Fr. Reese is not making this up. It is the Judaeo-Christian tradition going back over 2600 years, even before Isaiah. Our Christian faith is clear, justice and peace are not achieved by violence.

The work for justice and peace is done within prayer

The work for justice begins with prayer and accompanies the hard work for it along the way to the ending point, which usually serves as the starting point for the next concern. It’s as St. Paul says, *“Pray always.”*

Justice works *to stop evil* wherever it is happening: in the Middle East, in the world, in our country, in our neighborhoods, in our church, and especially in ourselves.

Justice works *to prevent* the conditions which lead to evil: in the Middle East, in the world, in our country, in our neighborhoods, in our church, and especially in ourselves.

Justice is an attitude - it’s who I am, which means that my first response will be not to “bomb” the Isis-like people that come into my life.

If this doesn’t require prayer, I don’t know what does.

I’m not making any of this up, this is the Judaeo-Christian tradition going back over 2600 years, even before Isaiah. As Pope Paul VI says: *“If you want peace, work for justice.”*

War is not the answer. We are the answer. All of us. All of us who are weary of turmoil and conflict, who seek a world free of war and threats of war, who seek a society with equity and justice for all, who seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled, who seek an earth restored.

If God is for us, who can be against us?