

The recent elections in Iraq took a step forward in establishing stability. Still, some factions are threatening to break the fragile union of the nation. The Iraqi people suffered many years under an oppressive dictator and now are living beneath a cloud of war while they yearn and pray for peace and justice. We rejoice in any good news from Iraq, while we remain aware that warfare and oppression are common in many nations around the world.

Such countries resemble the one in today's responsorial psalm. "May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us. May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity; the nations on the earth you guide." That psalm was prayed by a people looking for the blessings of good crops, a just government and the salvation that comes from God alone. It was first prayed by people living in oppression, searching for peace.

We have our problems in northwest Missouri today but nothing like this. Some people here have lost family members by violence, but most of us get angry over everyday events: rude behavior in a parking lot, teenage hair styles, vegetables we don't like, or hard drives that crash. We often forget how blessed we are to have food, stores, computers and families. In Iraq and other places of war, people don't have sufficient nutrition, supplies or electricity, and most families expect that some members will die from violence. It's a whole different world, and our concerns seem petty by comparison.

January 1st is set aside as a world day of prayer for peace. Pope Paul VI began the custom in the 1970s. Pope John Paul II continued the practice, and Pope Benedict is doing so as well. He has just issued his first message for the world day of peace. He chose as his theme a line from Vatican II's document on the Church in the Modern World, which says we will not succeed in "building a more human world for everyone, everywhere on earth, unless all people are renewed in spirit and converted to the truth of peace." The truth of peace. Pope Benedict says, "When we hear the Gospel, dear brothers and sisters, we learn to build peace on the truth of a daily life inspired by the commandment of love. Every community should undertake an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace. At the same time," Benedict continues, "I ask for an increase of prayers, since peace is above all a gift of God, a gift to be implored incessantly. By God's help, our proclamation and witness to the truth of peace will be all the more convincing and illuminating."

As we end one year and begin another, let us recommit ourselves to the truth of peace. In our homes peace is frustrated when we do not speak the truth. Sometimes, when we do speak the truth about our wants, we discover they are embarrassingly selfish. The truth will make us happy with who we are and what we have. The truth will make us more loving. The truth will set us free. The truth will bring peace.