

**This week Pope Benedict apologized for causing offense to Muslims. The pope recently spoke to a group of scholars in Regensburg, Germany, where he used to teach. He opened his address with a 600-year old quote from a Christian emperor who condemned Islam for spreading the faith by the sword. The reaction from radicals has been sharp. The government of Pakistan condemned the pope and called for him to step down. Several Christian churches in Gaza were firebombed. A nun was killed in Somalia – all apparently in retaliation for the pope’s words. Vatican authorities stressed that the pope’s remarks were taken out of context, and that he has a deep respect for Islam. Benedict says his words were “an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue, with great mutual respect.”**

**The pope’s remorse indicates he could have chosen better words. He is probably sorry not just because he respects Islam, but because some of the people feeling offended are dangerous; they hold little respect for human life and culture. He is at the vortex of global furor where things can spin perilously out of control.**

**Although few of us will cause world news by things we say or do, we all have the experience of saying something that others take the wrong way. It can happen at a family gathering, in a classroom, or at work. We can offend another driver on the road and suddenly find ourselves in great danger. There are times when each of us is guilty of causing offense. That’s bad enough, but sometimes the people we offend react wildly out of proportion to what we have done.**

**That appears to be the situation in today’s responsorial psalm, “The Lord upholds my life.” This prayer was offered by someone in a heap of trouble. Enemies are rising up. They are “haughty”, “ruthless”, and people who “set not God before their eyes.” They are trying to kill the person who wrote this psalm. In that dangerous situation, the psalm opens with the prayer, “O God, by your name save me, and by your might defend my cause.” It closes, though, with confidence, the refrain we sang today: “The Lord upholds my life.” The last line is, “I will praise your name, O Lord, for its goodness.” So the psalm begins in terror but it ends with confidence that God will hear and answer this prayer.**

**We sing this psalm today because it foreshadows the life of Jesus. In the gospel he tells his disciples he will be handed over and killed by his enemies, but on the third day he will rise. Then he tells those who are arguing that if you want to be first, you have to be the servant of all.**

**Pope Benedict says religion and violence do not mix. If people aim to hurt you, seek nonviolent ways to stop them. If we are true to our beliefs in times of conflict, we will walk away vindicated; even if we lose a victory of the flesh, we can always obtain a victory of the spirit. Jesus did it by dying on the cross, and the pope is doing it by pleading for reconciliation.**

**If we have given offense, and someone threatens us, Jesus urges us not to be masters, but servants, and not to seek violence, but peace.**