

Several months ago the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a statement opposing a first-strike war against Iraq. Since that time many other religious bodies have agreed. Public debate is asking questions: Is the cause just? Who has the authority to wage war? Is first-strike ever justified? Will the innocent suffer? All those questions enter the territory of the just war theory, a topic that the Catholic Church, more than any other organization, has engaged for literally hundreds of years.

The American bishops spoke out again last week. Bishop Wilton Gregory said, "Our bishops' conference continues to question the moral legitimacy of any preemptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq." The bishops understand the danger of Saddam Hussein, but they oppose an invasion for at least three reasons: They believe we lack adequate evidence of an imminent attack by Iraq; they see no proof of Iraq's involvement in September 11; and they see a lack of support from the international community.

Pope John Paul II has sent an envoy to Iraq and has received their Vice Premier. The pope says war is always a setback for humanity. The Vatican would like Iraq to disarm, but it would also like the US to avoid war. War threatens innocent lives in Iraq, throughout the mideast and in the US.

The problem is how to contain evil people. It has been a problem since the beginning of the world. Today we hear about God's covenant with Noah after the flood. God had sent the flood to wipe out evil people, but afterwards, God promised not to do it again. God gave all living things – human and animal –another chance to survive.

The story of Noah probably never happened; it comes from a part of the bible dealing more with legends than with history. Still it shows God has the power to completely wipe out evil, but decided not to do it any more. Every sinner gets another chance. Even a terrorist gets a chance to repent.

This hope lies beneath the statements by our bishops and by our pope. Nobody wants evil to go unchecked, but we would like evil to have the opportunity to change. Every year during Lent we

**thank God for giving us sinners another chance to repent. Every sinner deserves the same chance.**