

War is about death. It is hard to think about that, especially when you know a soldier. Those who report the news understand how hard it is to face the news that people are dying. Sometimes news reporters explain the confrontation in terms of victory or defeat, as if the clash of armies is nothing more than another event in the Final Four. Some reporters cover human interest stories about individual soldiers. It's easier to look at a soldier comforting a child than to see soldiers killing adults. Sometimes the reports show from a distance the smoky landscape of a bombed-out city, like a scene from a disaster movie. We rarely see at close range individuals dying painfully. We hear no reliable reports about how many Iraqis are dead. War is about death, but reporters won't show it all to us. It is easier to tell this story as adventure and drama instead.

Our leaders are pleasantly surprised that no retaliatory attacks have terrorized American soil yet. But we seem to expect it to happen. We live with the possibility of sudden death. This is not altogether a bad thing. The gift of life includes the finality of death. It is all part of the same package. The thought of terror is horrible, but it might focus us more on the meaning of life. Life is lived for God, and it includes the grave.

In today's first reading Ezekiel prophesies to a nation that has known death. Some citizens died in war; others died in exile in a place called Babylon, right near modern-day Baghdad. But another ruler set them free and allowed them to return home. They should have been happy, but they were fearful, dispirited and aimless. God promised this: "My people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back. I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land." God remained faithful, even though the people had broken the covenant and suffered great loss.

This evening the elect of our community will stand before us one last time for prayers of scrutiny before their baptism at the Easter Vigil. They will experience a kind of death that night – a death that is not altogether bad. They will die to their former way of life and rise as new people with Jesus. They ask for our prayers tonight to help them put aside any fears that might keep them from confessing their faith.

As the conclusion of Lent draws near, with war in the news and fear in our face, let us remember the promise of God. We can look at death up close. We can hold it in our minds. Not even death will keep us from God.

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In today's first reading Jeremiah prophesies to a nation that has known death. Some citizens died in war; others died in exile in a place called Babylon, right near modern-day Baghdad. But another ruler set them free and allowed them to return home. They believed they had brought the exile upon themselves by straying from God's covenant. Now God was going to write the covenant on their hearts, so it wouldn't happen again. "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord."

God never loses patience with us, even when we lose patience with God. During Lent we become conscious of our sins, aware of our shortcomings, and more in touch with our cravings. At Easter, we celebrate the greatest promise of all, God will lift us from death to life. God has written this promise on our hearts. We need fear no war, no injury, no death.

As the conclusion of Lent draws near, with war in the news and fear in our face, let us remember the promise of God. We can look at death up close. We can hold it in our minds. God has written upon our hearts a covenant of hope.