

The terrorism committed against our nation this week must be condemned. The hijacking of airplanes is wrong. Holding human life hostage is wrong. Extinguishing innocent human life is wrong. The willful destruction of property is wrong. Mass murder is wrong.

Those who commit crimes against human life and against the dignity of the human person poison civilization. They dishonor the Creator of life. Such crimes debase the perpetrators more than they do the victims. As a church and as human persons, we have no tolerance for terrorism.

We have faced extraordinary fears this week. We have imagined the horror of those on board the hijacked planes and at work in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. We have been worried that more evil could happen. We have feared shortages of gas, food, and water. We wonder if we'll ever feel safe again in the air. We have shuddered to think that the sons and daughters of our community might be called up to serve in armed conflict. We don't want any of those fears. That they have been foisted upon us makes us angry.

The lectionary has assigned for this weekend the story of the prodigal son. I don't know anyone who feels like hearing a story about forgiveness today. On the day after the tragedy, those of us who gathered for the morning mass heard these words from the gospel assigned for the day: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Turn the other cheek." Those words are hard to swallow this week. And this story of the prodigal son seems hopelessly inappropriate to a nation seething with anger and the human desire for vengeance.

But this is precisely when the words of Jesus are important to hear. Yes, terrorism is wrong because it is an affront to the sanctity of human life. But it gives no license for more terrorism. Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you," not as they have done to you, not an eye for an eye, not a tooth for a tooth, not a victim for a victim. If we succumb to acts of vengeance that destroy more innocent life, evil wins out again. Superhuman as it sounds, the Christian response would seek resolution to this conflict in ways that will guarantee our protection, punish appropriately, and inspire nations and individuals to hallow peace. It's a tall order. Our president, our congress, and our military deserve our prayers. Our enemies have acted in ways that degrade their humanity. We seek a response that lifts up humanity.

What can we do? Fly the flag. Wear red, white, and blue. Donate blood. Pray. We can also do things that help society love peace. If you use violence and abusive words at home, get some help and stop that. If we've hurt someone, we can say we're sorry. We can drive less aggressively. We can stop being prejudiced. We can stop supporting the music, television, and movies that propagate an industry of hate. We can mind our tempers at sporting events for youth. We can build a society that denounces violence as it builds peace.