

This week Osama bin Laden called upon all of Islam to join in a holy war against the United States. He believes that our attack in Afghanistan is an attack against Islam. President Bush has stated repeatedly that we are not at war with Islam, and that we regard Muslims as our friends. The war is against terrorism. It is against extremists who happen to be Muslim, but who practice a perverse form of Islam. Leaders in the Catholic Church have praised the president's distinction.

Muslims are people who practice the Islamic faith. They believe in one God. They believe in angels and in prophets. They believe in life after death and that people are accountable for their actions. They say Jesus Christ was a great prophet, but not that he is the Son of God. They believe that Muhammad, born in the year 570, descended from Abraham's son Ishmael, just as Moses and Jesus descended from Abraham's son Isaac. So Christians, Jews, and Muslims all claim a common ancestor in Abraham.

Muslims practice their faith according to the five pillars of Islam. They profess a creed, basically that there is one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. They pray five times a day, based on texts from their holy book the Qur'an. They fast during the month of Ramadan, which will begin sometime next weekend. The starting date depends on atmospheric conditions and cannot be absolutely determined until the day arrives. Muslims practice stewardship by paying a tax to benefit the poor. And they make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives, if at all possible. These are the five pillars: belief, prayer, fasting, contributing, and pilgrimage. Those pillars are very similar to the ways Christians practice our faith.

In their religion, Muslims do not advocate violence and terror. Bin Laden is mistaken when he assumes that terrorism is justifiable in Islam, and he is mistaken to think that the war in Afghanistan is against Islam. It is not. It is against terrorism.

Jesus found himself in controversy with religious leaders of his day. Although they did not practice the scale of terrorism we have witnessed, these religious leaders did engage in acts of oppression and persecution. Jesus' own crucifixion partly resulted from controversies he had with religious leaders, like in today's gospel. This is the only passage in Luke where the Sadducees make an appearance. They try to show how ridiculous it is to believe in the resurrection. Jesus thinks it's ridiculous not to believe in resurrection. This story is an example of how people use their religious beliefs to argue and criticize.

Catholics can be guilty of the same behavior. Often we put down Protestants. Some of us are prejudiced against Jews. Many of us are now suspicious of Muslims. A true believer will see Christ in everyone, will honor the good beliefs that others hold, and will build on common standards to fashion a society of charity.