

Iraq is your enemy. Jesus says in today's gospel, "Love your enemies." Now what do you do? Glad I don't have to decide; it's hard to figure out what would be love in this case. This much I believe: Placing innocent lives in jeopardy is wrong. It would be wrong for Saddam to launch chemical warfare. It would be wrong for us to bomb innocent Iraqis and to increase the threat of terrorism on our own soil. It's frustrating because we've tried so much. Sanctions often hurt the wrong people; they only increase poverty and hunger. Diplomacy produces the best results, but it seems stalled. Glad I don't have to decide. If Jesus fashioned foreign policy it would sound very strange: "Love your enemies."

It's hard to swallow because of the American way. When we have conflict, we like to use force. If someone commits murder, people ask for the death penalty. If one car hits another, people sue. If someone drives with the brights on, people get angry--and violent. If the waitress brings the wrong order, people lower the tip. If one child hits another, that child hits back. Violence, punishment, and revenge are virtues in our society, glorified in our movies, permitted in our families. If Jesus were a lawyer, his advice would sound very strange: "Love your enemies."

How can we love when all we feel is hate? It is possible to possess some of both. Love is not the same as agreeing. We first learn love as an agreement, as an emotion, a free gift; it's fun; it brings life; we want it forever. But love is more than that. Love is a decision. Love is honoring the value of another person's life--whether they're in bed, in the womb, or in Iraq. Love doesn't mean agreeing with someone. It means respecting them. Love doesn't mean accepting someone's point of view. It may mean challenging them with our principles. Christians advocate winning through love, not violence, harrassment, and anger. Such victories are lessened by the destruction they cause.

Jesus asks us to love the people we hate. We don't have to agree with them, but we treat 'em right. If we don't, we destroy the real virtues inside us, and we become no better than they. It takes work; when folks like us get better at it, nations will get better at it too. Whenever we experience conflict--at home, on the streets, or between world powers, if we struggle in charity, love will win.