

The most popular piece of artillery in the war has been the Patriot missile. I think it's popular because the Patriot does what people want the whole war to do. When the Iraqis fire a SCUD missile, we send up a Patriot, which destroys the SCUD before it destroys its target. The Patriot stops the evil begun by a SCUD, and I think that's what people want the whole war to do--They want it to stop an evil aggression. They want it to bring justice.

However, many people are so thrilled with the Patriot they'd be disappointed if it never got the chance to work. And that bothers me. The aggression of Iraq against Kuwait is scary enemy action, but lust for vengeance is scary homefront action. Part of us likes to see enemies pay for what they've done, but the goal is justice, not necessarily punishment.

Let me tell you about Jonah. We hear part of the story in today's first reading, but it's not the familiar part. When most people think about Jonah they think about the menu at the Seafood Cafe. But let me summarize the whole story for you.

Jonah was a prophet. When God appeared and asked him to prophecy to Nineveh, Jonah said no. He jumped on board a ship, and ran away from God. But the ship ran into terrible storms, and the crew guessed that someone had jinxed them. They threw dice and figured out it was Jonah. He admitted he was the problem, so the crew tossed him overboard, and he was swallowed by a giant fish. The fish didn't like Jonah any better. Three days and three nights later the fish vomited him up on the shore. Jonah stood up in his new surroundings and found himself in Nineveh, exactly where he wanted not to go. So, he figures, OK, God, you win, and he begins prophesying: "Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed." And then, after hearing one sentence from Jonah, the people repented, the king wore sackcloth and ashes, and the whole town was spared. And Jonah? Jonah sulked. He was hoping to see Nineveh destroyed. He wanted to see the Patriot missiles of Nineveh miss the SCUDS of Yahweh. But no. They repented. No fun in Nineveh today. That's the story of Jonah.

When someone hurts us, as a nation or individually, our reflex is to want to see them pay. We want them punished, and we want to see the pain. We've been misled to think that the goal for wrongdoing is punishment. It's not. The ^{goal} for wrongdoing is conversion. "Repent," Jesus says, "and believe in the good news."

This is the saddest reality about the war. People suppose that if we outshoot the enemy, we win. But arms do not win--conversion of heart wins. To change the way people think about aggression wins. It's very hard once the war has begun; it's hard to teach that aggression is wrong when the teacher carries bombs. But the goal of war is the same goal as conflict in our lives--not to punish, not to brutalize, but to change the way people think, and to bring justice for all.