

The crisis in the Persian Gulf has reached its eleventh hour. And nobody wants this endgame. People debate what is right and wrong, because to me it's not clear what is the "right action" for our country to take.

^{A lesson of} Several points are clear: First is that the aggression of Iraq against Kuwait must be condemned. No moral system approves such a capture of one country by another. A second clear point is that everyone wants peace. War would result in the waste of natural resources, widespread famine, and the irreplaceable loss of human life on both sides of the conflict. No one wants that.

The biggest debate is over how to achieve a just peace. Should it come through sanctions or should it come through violence? The Catholic Church, in statements by Pope John Paul and by the bishops of the United States, has repeatedly asked for peace through sanctions. The Church has taught that war can be theoretically justified, but only as a last resort, and that's what's unclear: Have we tried every other means? Sanctions by their nature take time to be effective. Have we tried them long enough? ~~It's not clear to me.~~ ^{That's the moral debate.}

Ironically, this question of war comes when the Church is celebrating its feast of peace, Christmas. Today, the Baptism of the Lord, closes the Christmas season in the Church.

Baptism marks the beginning of Jesus' public life and proclaims who he is. John the Baptist says Jesus is "one more powerful than I." The voice from the heavens calls him "the Son in whom I am well-pleased." The first letter of John calls him "the conqueror of the world." That title might alarm both George Bush and Saddam Hussein. These titles tell us at the beginning of his ministry what to expect from Jesus. Later, he calms the storm, he walks on water, he multiplies loaves and fish, he heals the sick, raises the dead to life, and is himself raised from the dead. By the end of the Gospel, there's no doubt that Jesus is the powerful one, that Jesus is the conqueror of the world.

That's why I believe that progress for peace in the Gulf belongs to us who believe in Jesus. It's imperative that we pray for peace to the one with power to grant it. As a church, prayer is our field of expertise. The world needs us now.

I also believe that our prayer will be the more effective if the life we live is marked by peace. We all suffer conflicts with other people, with institutions, and with ourselves. Some we run away from, some we blow up at. We resort too quickly to anger and violence instead of working for peace.

This week, as followers of Jesus Christ, and members of our great Church, I hope we will commit ourselves to these two tasks: prayer for peace, and lives of peace. We can make a difference in the Gulf and at home.