

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Each Sunday at noon the pope strolls toward an open window of his apartments above St. Peter's Square to pray the Angelus with those gathered below. He also gives a spiritual address and adds some concluding remarks. Last Sunday Pope Leo said this about the situation in the Middle East: "We cannot remain silent in the face of the suffering of so many persons, helpless victims of these conflicts. Anything that wounds them wounds all humanity. The death and sorrow provoked by these wars are a scandal for the whole human family and a cry for the presence of God. I strongly renew my appeal to persevere in prayer until the hostilities cease and paths of peace are opened at last, founded on sincere dialogue and with respect for the dignity of every human person."

Today we hear Matthew's account of the Passion of our Lord, detailing more violence: arrest and torture, the shedding of blood, denial and swordplay. Jesus says chillingly, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword." The betrayal by Judas looms throughout. The Passion begins when Judas accepts thirty pieces of silver, betrayal is the topic of conversation at the Last Supper, Judas hands Jesus over in the Garden of Gethsemane, and later Judas expresses this remorse for what he has done: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." He offers to return the silver, but there's no returning Jesus, who becomes an example of the helpless who suffer at the wrath of others.

Pope Leo has been asking heads of State to put down the sword and end the conflict, and he appeals to us to pray for hostilities to cease. In the midst of violence, it is hard for Christian principles to prevail. Even a conflict between two individuals affects other people. All the more reason that we school ourselves in words, attitudes and behaviors that, as Pope Leo says, open paths of peace, "founded on sincere dialogue and with respect to the dignity of every human person." We cannot remain silent. We have opportunities every day to engage in dialogue, building a culture that respects the dignity of others.

Sometimes there's little a person can do to deflect violence, as the Passion of Jesus shows, but often there's a lot one can do without retuning violence, as Jesus also showed. Pope Leo suggests we talk to others and respect their views. A better world begins with an intention to use peaceful means to achieve peaceful results.