

# Church does not teach 'might makes right'

By Fr. Richard P. McBrien,  
Syndicated columnist

Some Republicans have been making a political issue of the Congressional votes taken in January to authorize the immediate use of military force in the Persian Gulf.

While acknowledging that the votes against the war resolutions may have been expressions of "conscience," they insist that the votes were nevertheless "wrong" and that the members of Congress who supported the continuation of sanctions over the immediate use of military force should suffer the political consequences.

(They also argue, with some plausibility, that if the war had gone badly, the Democrats would have held the Republicans politically accountable.)

I write this week not to defend the Democrats, but to defend the church's

moral tradition as applied to questions of war and peace.

If one is attentive to the implicit argument being raised against those in Congress who voted for sanctions over military force, one realizes just how morally offensive that argument really is.

Because the war was so successful, these partisan politicians are saying, a vote to authorize the immediate use of military force was obviously the "right" vote while a vote to continue with the sanctions was just as obviously the "wrong" vote, considerations of conscience notwithstanding.

Put in its starkest terms: Might makes right.

No cynical principle could be farther removed from the moral standards of the Gospel and the church than this one.

The fact that the war in the Persian Gulf

was so overwhelmingly successful — so swift, so decisive, so free of major casualties on "our" side — does not automatically justify the war on moral grounds.

Last November and again in mid-January, just before the outbreak of hostilities, the U.S. Catholic bishops had raised two objections to the proposed use of military force: (1) the war did not seem to have been a "last resort," and (2) the expected loss of life and other manner of harm to persons, property, and the environment did not seem to be "proportionate" to the good to be achieved, namely, the immediate liberation of Kuwait.

Neither one of those moral arguments, both drawn from the traditional criteria for a just war, has necessarily been displaced



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

by the successful outcome of the war.

Politics aside, a vote in favor of sanctions and against the use of military force may still have been the "right" vote.

Take the matter of "last resort." The sanctions had been in place for only a few months, and there was evidence that they were beginning to work. Whether they would have ultimately forced Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait without eventual recourse to violence; we'll never know. That course wasn't taken.

Secondly, consider the consequences of the war: the massive loss of life on the Iraqi side — civilian as well as military — and the smaller number of casualties among the allied forces, the grave damage to the environment through the oil spills and oil-well fires, the collapse of the social and economic infrastructures in Iraq and Kuwait, the imminent danger of an epidemic of typhoid and cholera in Iraq because of water pollution, and the tearing apart of family life, especially in Iraq, because of this death and destruction.

All of these and other consequences have to be factored into our moral calculations regarding proportionality, and not just the losses suffered by "our" side.

*Newsweek* magazine carried a sobering analysis of the war in its March 11 issue, "Avoiding the Next Crisis." The piece opened with this sentence: "In all the euphoria over America's triumph in the gulf, one thing shouldn't be forgotten: this war could have been avoided."

The article continued: "If Western states hadn't helped arm Iraq to the teeth, if Washington hadn't misjudged Saddam's designs on Kuwait, if Americans weren't so hooked on cheap Middle Eastern oil, the United States might not have had to send over a half-million troops to fight Operation Desert Storm."

These are sobering considerations that have a direct moral bearing on the case. If we and our allies had acted more prudently and more responsibly on the political level and if our business communities had subordinated their appetite for profits to the need for stability and peace in the region, this war would have been even less a "last resort" than it was.

Whether the war was morally justified is as debatable today as it was last November following the massive buildup of allied forces in Saudi Arabia and again in mid-January just before the bombing began.

Republicans and Democrats can draw whatever conclusions they wish about the war for their own political purposes. But committed Christians can't allow political considerations to overwhelm moral ones.

# Thomas believes once he sees the risen Christ

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

Thomas trudged up the stairs wearily. When he reached the landing in front of the door, he hesitated for a minute and listened. The voices coming from inside the room were muffled, but even so, he still recognized the person speaking as Peter.

Thomas smiled faintly. Peter, John and all of those who had been closest to Jesus had become like his family. It would be hard to leave them. But with Jesus gone, there was nothing left to do but go back to the life he had known. Was it possible after all that had happened?

As soon as Thomas knocked lightly, all of the talking ceased immediately. A voice belonging to Mary Magdalene called through the locked door back to him: "Who is there?"

"It's me, Thomas."

Everyone greeted him warmly, but Thomas couldn't shake his awkward feeling about this room. It was here that they had shared their last meal with Jesus.

"Thomas, it's good to see you!" John said. "Come, sit with us."



## THE BIBLE CORNER

"We were all deciding what to do next," Andrew added. "Perhaps you, Thomas, with your logical mind, can help us."

Thomas looked around the table at each one of them before he replied. "Do next? I've come here to say goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye?" Matthew asked. "There is much work to be done. Jesus told us to go forth and tell everyone what happened."

"The new kingdom Jesus promised has begun," Peter continued. "It's up to us now."

Thomas shook his head and said, "When Jesus died, his kingdom died with him. There's no point to this anymore."

"You still don't believe us?" John asked. "Only a week ago, Jesus came to this room and stood here alive among us."

"I, too, feel pain and sorrow in my heart over losing him," Thomas admitted. "But

you can't allow your mind to fabricate stories which aren't true. Otherwise, you'll never be able to go on with living."

"Thomas, Jesus rose from the dead, just as he promised," Mary added. "I saw the empty tomb and I spoke to Jesus."

"I saw Jesus crucified like a criminal!" Thomas insisted. "What you are all saying is just too good to be true."

Thomas said little more to the others as they ate the meal. Deep in his heart, he knew he was brooding over something else. Everyone there, except him, claimed to have seen Jesus. He, too, had been one of the inner circle of those closest to the master.

If Jesus was alive, why hadn't he appeared to him, too? An entire week had passed since these others saw Jesus.

Thomas was still nursing this hurt in silence when suddenly Jesus was there again in the room. "Peace, friends," Jesus said.

Then he looked directly at Thomas and said, "Come, Thomas, put your finger on my hands. Touch my side."

Thomas was on his knees before Jesus immediately. "I'm sorry. You are my Lord and my God!"

"Stop your doubting now and believe," Jesus said gently. "You believe because you have seen me with your own eyes. It is more blessed to believe without seeing."

**Scripture reference:** John, Chapter 20:19-31.

**Meditation:** Is my life a reflection of the resurrection or just the crucifixion of Jesus?

**Postscript:** Although Thomas became known as "doubting Thomas" after this incident, it has been said that he carried the good news as far as India and established a Christian community there. A Gospel was attributed to him as well.

## Special Olympics meet set for Nazareth College

ROCHESTER — Approximately 150 Monroe County Special Olympians will participate in the annual swim meet at Nazareth College April 13.

Athletes will represent several schools and agencies including Edison Tech, Wilson Magnet, Douglass Middle School, Jefferson Middle School, Association for Retarded Citizens, School of the Holy Childhood, BOCES 1 and 2, Lifetime Assistance, Brockport Thursday Evening Adult Recreation, St. Joseph's Villa, Heritage Christian School and the Mary Cariola Children's Center.

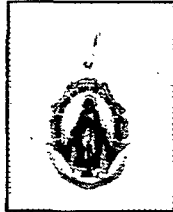
Among the events slated for the day are

25- and 50-yard freestyles, 25-yard backstroke, 25-yard breaststroke, 25-yard butterfly, 100-yard freestyle relay, walk with assistance, and swim with assistance.


Opening ceremonies will begin at 9:45 a.m. and the event will end at about 1 p.m. The Nazareth College pool is located in the Otto A. Schultz Community Center, 4245 East Ave.

The event is coordinated by Sylvia Korn of the School of the Holy Childhood. Chase Lincoln First Bank will be introduced at the events as a Special Olympics sponsor, and fruit drinks for athletes will be provided by Seneca Foods.

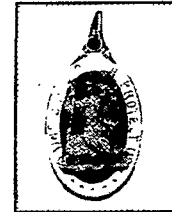
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