

Aftermath of war verified pope's warnings

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

The glow has faded from the allies' "great military victory" in the Persian Gulf. Instead of basking in the sunlight of a "new world order," the gulf region is in an even greater mess today than it was on Jan. 16, when President George Bush initiated military action against Iraq.

Kuwait is still literally ablaze, its atmosphere thickened with pollution, its skies darkened at midday, its waters and shores coated with oil, its national character sullied by incidents of brutal revenge against Iraqis and Palestinians.

Iraq's own infrastructure is in shambles. Many thousands, even millions, of its citizens, have been deprived of the basic

necessities of life: water, electricity, housing, transportation and medical care.

Encouraged by President Bush to overthrow Saddam Hussein (but without the necessary military support), the Kurds in the north and the Shiite Muslims in the south were savagely beaten back and then driven from their homes.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees, in-



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cluding countless children and aged, have been devastated by disease, malnutrition, and exposure to the elements. Their efforts to escape the Saddam regime have, in turn, created new and overwhelming problems for the bordering nations of Turkey and Iran.

On Jan. 12, three days before the outbreak of war, Pope John Paul II touched directly upon the crisis in the Persian Gulf in his annual address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican.

Not unmindful of Iraq's "brutal violation of international law" through its invasion of Kuwait, the pope nevertheless warned that "a peace obtained by arms could only prepare new acts of violence."

The pope was right.

He spoke of the cost in human life, "even in limited military action ... to say nothing of the ecological, political, economic and strategic consequences, whose full gravity and import we have perhaps not yet completely assessed."

And he referred, as the U.S. Catholic bishops had done, to the centuries-old criteria for a just war.

"Recourse to force for a just cause," he said, "would only be admissible if such recourse were proportionate to the result one wished to obtain and with due consideration for the consequences that military actions, today made more destructive by modern technology, would have for the survival of peoples and the planet itself."

"The needs of mankind," he continued, "require that we proceed resolutely toward outlawing war completely and come to cultivate peace as a supreme good to which all programs and all strategies must be subordinated."

On Jan. 16, the day President Bush ordered the bombing of Iraq, Pope John Paul II sent an urgent appeal to the White House and another to Baghdad.

"In recent days, voicing the thoughts and concerns of millions of people, I have stressed the tragic consequences which a war in that area could have," the pope wrote to Bush.

In the euphoria of victory, it seemed to many Americans as if those who had supported the authorization of military force before Jan. 15 had been right all along, while those who had supported the continuation of sanctions had walked the path of weakness and even appeasement.

But every day that passes now verifies the moral stance taken by Pope John Paul II and the U.S. Catholic bishops (with at least one disturbing exception).

Holy Spirit empowers apostles to spread Gospel

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

From the upper room of a house in Jerusalem, Peter surveyed the streets below. As was their custom since Jesus had left them, all of the apostles came here daily to pray.

"I've never seen such crowds come to the city for the holy day before," Peter commented to the others as he turned from the window.

"Maybe this is the right time for us to begin telling others about Jesus," Matthew replied.

"Jesus told us to wait here until he sent his spirit to help us," John said. "Only then should we begin."

"I'm still not certain I understand what he meant about us being given power to witness," continued Andrew, Peter's brother. "Without Jesus here, I still don't feel my life can make a difference with people."

"I'm confused, too. Jesus told us that we could come before him and pray about anything that's on our minds," Peter said. "Maybe that is what is needed now."

All of them began to pray, first in silence and then each one gave voice to his thoughts. Suddenly, they all heard and felt



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a strong gust of wind in the room even though all of the doors and windows were closed.

"Look!" Peter cried. "A flame has settled over each of our heads. And yet the fire does not consume anything."

Outside, in the street below, a great crowd had gathered. From their vantage point, the house appeared to be on fire. These people were even more perplexed when the apostles came out to the street and spoke to them.

People from many different countries, each with its own language, had come to Jerusalem for the holy day. Everyone in the crowd could understand what Peter was saying in their respective language.

"How can this be?" some of them called out. "It must be some sort of miracle!"

But others in the crowd loudly protested the claim. "A miracle? These men are Galileans. They are simply drunk and playing a joke on us!"

Peter came forward and called for silence. "Fellow Jews, I've heard what you have been saying. No, we are not drunk at 9 in the morning! What you have just witnessed was foretold many years ago by the prophet, Joel. It has been shown to you now so that you will believe what I am going to tell you.

"A short time ago, God sent Jesus Christ, his own son, to live among you. Jesus performed many miracles so that you would have faith that he was the long-awaited Messiah. Even so, he was arrested and crucified like a criminal by those who refused to believe in him.

"His crucifixion was all part of God's plan. After three days, Jesus rose from the dead. We have seen him and he is alive. We stand before you today as his witnesses," Peter said.

"What should we do now?" said people. "Repent of your sins," Peter told them. "If you believe in Jesus, there is forgiveness. Let us baptize you as a follower of Jesus Christ. Then, you, too, will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as you have seen today."

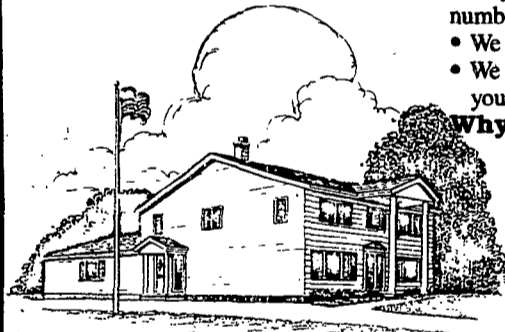
Scripture reference: Acts, Chapter 2.

Meditation: Jesus, send your spirit to show us how to live.

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