

Catholic faith steeled Anderson

WIESBADEN, Germany (CNS) — Former hostage Terry Anderson says his faith kept him from "giving in to my despair" during his six-and-a-half years in captivity in Lebanon.

In a Dec. 6 press conference at the U.S. military hospital in Wiesbaden, the 44-year-old Anderson said that as a Catholic, he felt compelled to forgive his captors, "no matter how hard that may be."

Although his Shiite Muslim kidnapers "did great wrong to me and my family," he said, "I don't hate anybody."

"I am a Christian and a Catholic and I really believe that it is required of me that I forgive, no matter how hard that may be," added Anderson, who went to high school in Batavia.

He said he was given a Bible during his captivity, and "my faith kept me from giving in to my despair. The Bible gave me a lot of hope."

Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press and the longest-held Western hostage, praised former hostages Servite Father Lawrence Martin Jenco and the Rev. Benjamin Weir as men of great faith and said he was grateful they had shared their faith with him.

Anderson was the third U.S. hostage released in three days. The others were Joseph Cicippio and Alann Steen.

Meeting with reporters after his release, Anderson was asked what kept him going all those years.

"My companions. I was lucky enough to have other people with me most of the time," he said. "My faith. Stubbornness, I guess."

"You just do what you have to do. You wake up every day and you summon up the energy from somewhere, even when you think you haven't got it, and you get through the day. And you do it day after day after day," said Anderson.

Father Jenco, who was released in July 1986, now works as campus minister at the University of Southern California at Los Angeles. Weir, a Presbyterian minister freed in September 1985, is professor of mission and evangelism at the San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, Calif.

Anderson described his captors as very religious and said he did not



AP/Wide World Photos
Former U.S. hostage Terry Anderson (left) and his sister Peggy Say put their heads together during a news conference in Wiesbaden, Germany Dec. 6. The chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press was released by his Beirut captors Dec. 4.

understand how they could feel so strongly about their Islamic faith and still do what they did.

The news conference, two days after Anderson's release from captivity, also covered a wide range of other topics, from U.S. policy in the Middle East to the journalist's personal plans after leaving Wiesbaden.

Father Jenco said seeing Anderson free reminded him that "man is able to cope with so much pain and suffering and still come out healthy and holy."

Watching Anderson on television as he addressed reporters on his first day of freedom "was fun," said Father Jenco. "It made me remember how bullish Terry was" when the two were confined to the same room.

"He would pound (on the walls) and demand a radio. The vibrancy and tenaciousness are still there," said Father Jenco in a Dec. 5 telephone interview.

Father Jenco, a Catholic Relief Services program director in Beirut when he was taken hostage, said Anderson was the last person he saw before he was freed in 1986.

With Anderson's release, "that part of our lives is over. The waiting is over," he said.

Calling Anderson a "recovering Catholic," the priest said he had been blindfolded in a separate cubicle in the same room as Anderson for a long time before the two were allowed to meet.

"We had heard each other's voices but didn't know who each other was. When they finally lifted the blindfolds, the first thing Terry asked was that I hear his confession," said Father Jenco.

He said he, Anderson and the other hostages with them prayed frequently.

The priest said Scripture says to "pray behind closed doors, to pray with others, that you are to be patient and wait for the Lord, to be forgiving — those were the elements of prayer that all of us got caught up in."

"Complaint prayers were important. We learned not to be ashamed of complaining to God," he said.

Father Jenco said at one point during the ordeal Anderson fashioned rosaries for himself and fellow hostages out of string.

He said there were times when the hostages would get on each others' nerves. "It came to a point where you wished you were alone. But there was no privacy," he said.

With the holidays approaching, the



AP/Wide World Photos
Terry Anderson enjoys a light moment with his 6-year-old daughter Sulome at the Wiesbaden Air Force hospital in Germany Dec. 5.

priest recalled the Christmas he spent as a hostage.

"We all listened to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corp.). We heard Terry Waite had faltered with negotiations and was going back to London. It was very difficult. We tried to sing Christmas carols."

Later he said the guards brought them a cake that said "Happy Birthday, Jesus."

Waite, the Anglican Church envoy who was negotiating on behalf of the hostages, later was taken hostage himself. He was freed Nov. 18.

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