

Believers try to make sense of senseless bombing

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The bomb that nearly disintegrated a federal office building April 19 not only shook Oklahoma City but rattled the religious faith of a country full of believers.

Coming three days after Easter and in the middle of Passover, the blast that killed scores in the Alfred P. Murrah building left people across the country asking "how could God let this happen?" — questioning the faith they had just proclaimed on the central Christian holy day and during the Jewish observance of a historic example of God's mercy toward believers.

The deaths couldn't be rationalized as resulting from a natural disaster or

being a consequence of war — the victims were children, office workers and Social Security recipients, in the heartland of a country at peace, far from the expected venues of senseless violence.

"Probably the hardest question in all theology is how to reconcile such seemingly senseless suffering with an all-loving, all-powerful God," acknowledged Marcellino D'Ambrosio, an assistant professor of religion at the University of Dallas, a Catholic college. "Thomas Aquinas said human suffering is the greatest argument against the existence of God, yet God allows for great good to come from suffering."

The heroic service of those trying to rescue victims; the empathy and compassion being shown by people not personally touched by the blast; the new



Reuters/RNS
Friends and relatives of Pamela Argo embrace April 23, following a memorial service for victims of the federal building bombing in Oklahoma City.

gratitude and appreciation for their own loved ones felt by millions of people who watched the aftermath of the explosion on television — these were immediate examples of good coming from evil, D'Ambrosio said.

Even admitting that the bombing was an evil act is important and can help people understand that good can come of it, said D'Ambrosio and others. "Especially coming in the Easter sea-

son, this is a reminder that in our own lives, hatred and evil are real," said D'Ambrosio.

"This shows very starkly the horror and destruction of sin," he said. "It's often not so easy to see the power of sin in our own lives because it's on such a smaller scale. But sin is outrageous all the time and we need to recognize its destructive power in our own lives."

It's important at times of tragedy to accept that death and horror exist in the world, not just to wail about the apparent unfairness of how it strikes, said Brian Gerrard, an associate professor in the counseling and psychology program at the Jesuit-run University of San Francisco. "The point is not to dwell on it, but to focus on those who survived and those who are heroes."

"This kind of situation is the ultimate test of our humanity," said Gerrard. "It is an opportunity to grow as a person."

Two lessons from the Oklahoma bombing and from other jarring examples of suffering are that "evil is real and tragedy is a mystery we just don't get," said Jesuit Father Daniel Liderbach, author of "Why Do We Suffer? New Ways of Understanding," and a teacher of religious studies and theology at Canisius College, a Jesuit school in Buffalo.

In recognizing that evil exists, people can work on reshaping their own lives, first by acknowledging that there are things over which humans have little power and then taking up the challenge to turn the tragedy into something greater, he said.

"We insist that 'this is wrong,' and we demand that life is better, that it will be better," Father Liderbach said. "It's a call to hope."

Bishop Clark calls for prayers

In calling for prayers for the people of Oklahoma City, Bishop Matthew H. Clark released the following statement, dated April 22:

An event such as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City horrifies people of good will everywhere. Ironically, the heroic acts of those who respond selflessly in crisis situations strengthens our faith in the essential goodness of humankind.

In his recent encyclical, "Evangelium Vitae," His Holiness John Paul II cites such inhuman acts as evidence of a pervasive "culture of death" which Catholic Christians are called to

oppose. Especially during this holiest of seasons, when we celebrate God's gift of life, made even more precious by Christ's life, death and resurrection, our hearts cry out against senseless violence.

I ask that diocesan Catholics join others of faith in prayer for the victims, especially the children, and for their families, friends, and colleagues. May we keep peace rather than vengeance in our hearts, and go about our daily lives in a fashion which reflects our Gospel belief in the inherent sacredness and dignity of all persons.

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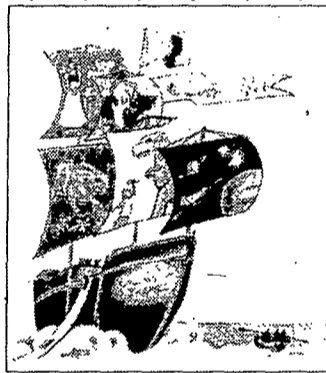
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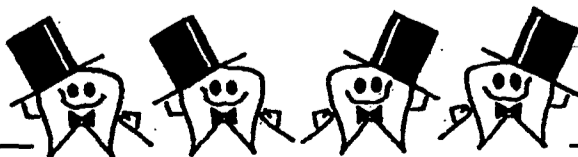
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