

War threat colors Lenten journey

As we come to the holy season of Lent, I want to share some thoughts with you about the possibility of our nation initiating a war with Iraq. I hope that the following considerations will find a place in your thinking, prayer and conversations in the weeks ahead.

Of great concern are the moral and ethical implications of a preemptive strike against an already suffering people. Earlier this year, in a statement to diplomats assigned to the Vatican, Pope John Paul II reminded world leaders: "War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations. As the Charter of the United Nations and international law itself remind us, war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of preserving the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations."

Our Holy Father's impassioned words to the diplomatic corps echo the cries of the prophets and a century of Catholic social teaching as he urges: "No to war. War is not al-



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

ways inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between states, the noble exercise of diplomacy: These are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences."

I am deeply troubled by the evermore intense talk of our nation invading Iraq. And I know from many conversations and from following print and electronic media that I am by no means alone in this concern. People across our nation and around the world question this impetus toward war, and insist that there are better ways to protect the human family from the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. I believe with

them that we have not come close to the point at which we can legitimately claim that war is the last and only resort available to us. Even in today's news, I read that Pope John Paul II has asked Cardinal Pio Laghi to bring President Bush a message urging him to commit to international law and diplomacy as surer means to genuine and lasting peace, and to seek that peace by all means short of war.

We are by all standard measures the most powerful and wealthiest nation on earth — perhaps in the history of the world. With such power come enormous responsibilities. Our hallmarks in the international arena ought to be extraordinary patience and restraint, and a commitment to persuasion and negotiation — not coercion — to achieve our legitimate goals.

If we do not take that course, we expose ourselves to such criticisms as these:

- 1) We seize by force what we cannot achieve by persuasion;
- 2) We behave as though we believe that might makes right;
- 3) We place our national interests above common concern for the community of nations; and
- 4) We are willing to wreak havoc on another nation to protect a standard of living that is far above that which a vast majority of the world's people can ever hope to achieve.

I am mindful, as I write these words, that some readers will disagree with me, even be angered or troubled by what I have written. To them, I would say that my effort has

been to represent my thinking about the Iraq question in light of our Catholic moral tradition as best I understand it.

To my earlier references to the position of the Holy See, let me add an invitation to read "A Statement on Iraq" by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ([www.usccb.org/Departments/Social Development World Peace](http://www.usccb.org/Departments/Social%20Development/World%20Peace)) and "Reflections on a War Against Iraq," prepared by the Priests' Council of our diocese ([www.dor.org/Response to Iraq/Terrorism](http://www.dor.org/Response%20to%20Iraq/Terrorism)).

For those who may not have access to the Internet, I have asked the Justice and Peace staff at Catholic Charities to make these documents available to all. Please call 585/328-3210, ext. 1303, to receive these printed materials.

Whether you agree or disagree with what I have written, I know that we all yearn for the peace that only God can give. So I invite you to join me in the days ahead in responding to this invitation recently extended by our Holy Father: "This year we will undertake the penitential journey toward Easter with a greater commitment to prayer and fasting for peace, challenged by the growing threat of war. ... Peace, in fact, is a gift of God to be invoked with humble and insistent trust ... without surrendering before difficulties, it is also necessary to seek and go down every possible avenue to avoid war, which always brings mourning and grave consequences for all."

Peace to all.

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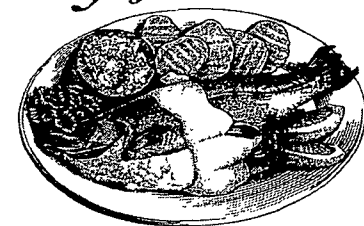
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