

Easter message for friend, foe alike

It is easier to celebrate Easter in a time and in circumstances of relative peace and prosperity than in a world torn by war, terrorist attacks, global tensions, economic downturns and social instability.

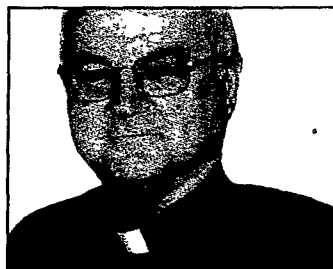
When everyday life is going well, the rhetoric of the feast flows effortlessly: "Christ is risen. We are an Easter people, and 'Alleluia' is our song. Hope is our hallmark and resurrection, our destiny."

But the credibility and power of such rhetoric depends on who hears it and in what situation. A congregation that has no serious and sustained worries about food, shelter or job security will nod approvingly. The words verify and legitimate their own happy life experience.

On the other hand, for a community living in poverty or under oppression, the words of Easter bear no meaningful connection with their world. At best, they convey promises and reassurances about the next.

The church's challenge at Easter is somehow to lay a bridge between its resurrection rhetoric and earthly realities; more specifically, to make that joyful rhetoric ring true even for the poor and the powerless.

At the end of his televised address to the nation just after launching military action against Iraq, the president of the United States asked God to "bless" America and its people. There was no mention, however, of Iraq



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

and its people, even though the president had assured us that the war was not against the Iraqi people but only its government.

Why, then, not pray for them?

The rhetoric of Easter can be put to the test by imagining one's own community in a wholly different situation. As the Easter narrative is proclaimed and preached, how readily can congregations in Chicago, San Francisco, Nashville or Philadelphia place themselves mentally and spiritually in Baghdad or in other cities, towns and villages in that newly inflamed region of the world?

In the end, this is not a matter of pacifism nor of politics: We may believe that President Bush was justified or not in initiating military action against Iraq.

The question is whether it is really possible, in a situation of war where thousands of a country's servicemen and servicewomen are at risk unto death, for Christians to place themselves somehow in the shoes of those on the other side of the conflict, to continue to see

the other as brother and sister — if not "in Christ," as fellow Christians, then as members of the one human family.

It is a strange and sad thing that, in a time of profound stress, so many abandon or forget some of the most basic elements of Christian faith and of the teachings of Jesus himself.

Love, which is the centerpiece of his whole moral message, is not to be reserved for one's family, friends and nation. When asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 9:52-56) in which he challenged us to see those we typecast as evil as having qualities also of goodness.

He commanded his disciples to love the enemy (Luke 6:27-28), to renounce revenge (6:29), to avoid judging and condemning others (6:37), and to be careful not to dwell on the speck in their neighbor's eye while missing the plank in their own (6:41-42).

In the end, we are called to imitate Jesus himself (Mark 10:45), to follow his example (John 13:15), to love one another as he has loved us (13:14). This is his first and greatest commandment.

To ignore or, worse, to reject that commandment is to empty Easter rhetoric of all meaning and force.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Bishops let Bush serve as own judge

To the editor:

Bishop Clark's strongest statement against the war was last October as a member of the Priests' Council: "... we believe that a war against Iraq ... conflicts with Catholic teaching." There is a world of difference between this approach and that of Romanian Catholic Bishop John M. Botean of the Diocese of St. George in Canton, Ohio. He is the only bishop who taught that the war is in fact unjust.

The contrast has increased since U.S. troops began their invasion. Bishop Clark, who personally believed the war was unjust, expressed his expectation that the U.S. would "continue to respect and uphold long-held tenets of human rights and the laws governing war" in a statement published in the *Courier* March 27. He also wrote, "Always, my thoughts and prayers and affection are with the faithful young women and men of our armed forces answering the call of our president. ... (C)oncerns about this war should not be transferred to military personnel and their families. They need and are entitled to our steadfast prayer and support."

Here a bishop commends soldiers for being faithful to a president whose orders include killing. It seems the just war theory of the U.S. Catholic bishops ultimately leaves the government to be the judge of its own cause.

Despite some objections and reluctance, the bishops have washed their hands and it is the president who is the final moral authority for our youth! Jesus who?

This Lent, most modern-day Apostles have once again abandoned Jesus in Gethsemane, terrified by the crystal clearness of His nonviolent intent. The "steadfast support" our youth need is the full truth of Gospel nonviolence. Evil and death cannot be overcome by following the president or the flag. *Vicit Agnus noster, eum sequamur*. Our Lamb has conquered, him let us follow.

Mark Scibilia -Carver
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Unemployed could assist in campaign

To the editor:

Bishop Clark appears to be disengaged when it comes to the new campaign to raise funds and the overall budget of the Diocese. His breakout includes administrative costs of \$2 million to raise the \$50 million. Yet on the so called investments the loss over two years is almost \$20 million. He is closing parishes, laying off personnel, closing Catholic schools at the same time asking us to form an endowment to keep them open, hiring out of town "Boiler Room" operations to solicit us for our donations in an environment of financial downturn. Why not get rid of the financial guru that is costing the Diocese millions of dollars per year with the so called investments and hire the laid-off personnel to work the phones for the campaign?

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Sees proof of fallacies

To the editor:

One of the misconceptions of the war in Iraq is that "hundreds of bombs and missiles" will be dropped on

Catholic Courier

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