

St. Julie Billiart Parish

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HOMILY

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Today I want to address the writings of one of our lesser known prophets, Habakkuk. Habakkuk at his time was writing about the violence of living under the conditions of an occupying army, the Babylonians. Habakkuk's lament is a simple straightforward cry,



“How long, O LORD? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery?”

This lament resonates with many people. I have heard people say, “I am tired of all this fighting.” “I don't understand why people are driven to violence.” “How can this happen?” Some people, like Habakkuk, direct their anger towards God and say, “If you exist, how is that you let the innocent suffer?” Some criticize the believers of God, “Your religion causes violence.” “All the wars in the world have been started by religion.”

When Habakkuk spoke to God, he spoke the only truth he knew.¹ He and his

¹ [Look at God's response to Habakkuk and ask how we entered into this war. For years prior to the war, many stories circulated in the media about the crimes of Sadaam and the horrible conditions suffered by the people of Iraq. As these stories became circulated more of us understood that Sadaam was a bad man; however, what wasn't told was that Sadaam rose to power and for many years stayed in power through the help of many powerful nations, including the United States. Secondary stories began to surface: that Sadaam was preparing to go to war and that he was extending his horrible power through collaboration with terrorists. As we are now finding out through congressional and independent investigations, these claims were to be kind, inaccurate or simply untrue. To be brutally honest, they were lies.

At the time; however, many people believed these stories and the drums of war were already beating. Along came September 11 and then it became very difficult to question the rationale for going to war with Iraq.]

people were weary of all the violence. The violence of occupation that arbitrarily arrested, detained, tortured and executed his people. Habakkuk also was weary of the violence of resistance fighters whose violence was called righteous.

Habakkuk reached the point where he regarded violence as violence, meaning he could not find any legitimacy – any purpose – to violence. He had answered the question: at what point does violence begin to look like retribution? Whether driven by righteousness or political interest, violence is indeed violence.

Habakkuk's complaints on violence and our complaints on war really have no answer. In fact, it is impossible for us human beings to respond to them because only God can answer. God's answer to Habakkuk is simple: one must write down the vision of peace: Work for peace and peace will eventually come.



Unlike war, peace cannot be entered into through lies and deceit. Peace takes time. Peace is built upon real connections with others. Peace requires a disposition of openness to others who are not like ourselves and forgiveness when we have made mistakes. Peace takes time because peace is a way of life it is not merely the cessation of war!

God's response to Violence is Peace and Forgiveness. Christ teaches us that our true nature is Peace and Forgiveness. Christ calls us to have faith: through faith we can command mountains to fall and mulberry bushes be thrown into the sea. If we are to have faith, then we will indeed claim our true nature, and be a people of complete and total service to others. Our purpose of life would be driven by the promotion of peace and forgiveness, not by the desire for personal power or for the protection of what claim as ours.



Our true nature is peace. The fact that we can imagine a peaceable kingdom/kin-dom, is because we have within ourselves the essence of peace. He calls us to let our light shine. St. Paul says we have "...the Spiritual gift (of the) power of love and self-control. (2 Timothy). Thus, at this time of retrospection on the war, let us not only blame our leaders for deceiving us into war. If there is to be lasting peace, we too must share in the responsibility for war? We believed the stories of evil dictatorships and we held our ears when critics said dictatorships are supported by our own foreign policy. We demonized the enemy and didn't check the facts. As a result, we denied our inner nature as servants of peace and accepted what was told to us that our predestined roles in the cosmos were to be righteous warriors of justice. We allowed ourselves to forget that WAR is NOT a natural act of humanity. PEACE is our "default preference." **The Great Lie is that we are preconditioned to act with aggression. This lie *perpetuates* war, it *legitimizes* torture and it *prolongs* the conflict.**²

As Christ's Body assembles here at this table, let us shed the falsehood of violence that stifles our inner peace. Let our true shine forth and become a beacon of hope for others who are caught up in the web of deceit and violence.

² The very threat of violence is in itself a violent act. Walking softly and carrying a big stick is itself an act of violence. When we march off to war – even when we haven't fired a shot, is an act of violence. Yet despite our history, we can imagine a world without war. How is that possible? How is it possible to forge peace accords? How is it possible to imagine the groundwork for reconciliation between enemies? We can imagine peace because we have peace built within us: that is the great truth. God created us not be warriors, but to be servants.