

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year C September 8, 2013

Theme: The Crisis of Syria

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“Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence.”

Last Sunday at noontime the voice of Pope Francis **prophetically and pleadingly** spoke those words from St. Peter’s Square as he begged the world not to use violence and warfare to settle the problems in Syria.

“Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence.”

The Pope’s heartfelt statement as well as his call for a day of prayer and fasting for peace in Syria garnered **little attention from the media** this week.

Similarly, his attempt and that of other religious leaders to bring a **moral dimension** into the discussion of the President’s proposal to engage in a military action in Syria have largely been fruitless.

This week we have heard and read strategic, diplomatic, military and political reasons for and against intervention but precious little consideration of moral and ethical reasoning.

Today I feel it is important that we hear what our Pope and Bishops as moral leaders are saying about this situation and want to present at least some of it to you.

The President of our American Catholic Bishops has written in the name of all our bishops to both the President and Congress and

asked that action Syria be seriously evaluated from a moral standpoint:

Archbishop Timothy Dolan wrote: *“A central moral question is: Will more or less lives and livelihoods be destroyed by military intervention. On this question Pope Francis has been clear: ‘How much suffering, how much devastation, how much pain has the use of arms carried in its wake in that martyred country, especially among civilians and the unarmed!’*

The Letter from the Bishops to Congress went on to make this powerful and definitive statement; *“Instead of employing armed force, in this situation our nation, working with the international community, should direct all of its energies urgently and tirelessly toward dialogue and negotiation.”*

Archbishop Dolan also noted in his letter the appeal from the bishops of the **ancient Christian communities in Syria** itself that the international community not resort to military intervention in their country.

These leaders too believe that such violence will breed only more violence exacerbating an already deadly situation and produce unintended consequences for their people.

The moral and ethical choice comes down to one of **resorting to the use of military force over dialogue and negotiation.**

Clearly a horrendous civil war has been underway in Syria for over two years and more than 100,000 people have already died.

Now a brutal dictatorial regime has apparently used chemical weapons on his own people and killed over a thousand civilians, including more than 300 children.

Does the United States have the **moral justification** to undertake a military action that will cause destruction, likely to cause more deaths and surely to cause animosity and anger among many Syrians and other nations of the region and world?

Or should we, as Pope Francis insists, Archbishop Dolan insists, continue to press for **international dialogue and negotiations**?

Does: **“War beget war, violence beget violence”**?

Jesus said it just a bit differently: **“Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.”**

Another moral question warns that deadly force – military action – may never be used when **other options are still be available**.

Destroying precious human life, likely many human lives, is extremely serious business and no one, and no nation, should undertake such action unless there are no other options.

In the case of action in Syria, other nations of the world believe there are other options, such as waiting until the United Nations inspectors deliver their report.

Thus, serious moral questions on this matter loom large if the United States were to unilaterally undertake a deadly attack on Syria.

This week as Congress moves to a votes, many political, military, diplomatic and strategic reasons for and against action in Syria will be offered.

As people of faith, we must always **press the moral question**: is this the right and good thing to do?

Will this bring peace or more suffering, more death, more evil in its wake?

Perhaps our leaders will **not listen to our voice** as they did not listen to the voice of Jesus, but we still we must speak.

Again as Pope Francis said last Sunday:

“May the plea for peace rise up and touch the heart of everyone so that they may lay down their weapons and be let themselves be led by the desire for peace.”