



## Praying for Peace

I try not to choose sides especially in events that do not directly involve me or events that are so complex I do not understand them. Sometimes, however, we are forced to take sides but if we do I hope we have all of the information that we need to determine what side we should choose. Choosing sides based on emotion is never a good idea since all emotions are inherently irrational and usually lead us to make the wrong decision in the end.

For more time than I care to remember, the news has been filled with images of war torn countries like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Israel and Palestine. Some people believe that we, and by we I mean Americans, should support Israel because they are the only democracy in the Middle East. Others think we should support Palestine in their quest for their own country. Both of those arguments may have merit to them, but just as I said in my last column, I come down on the side of protecting human life.

From an Orthodox Christian perspective, the waging of war is a sinful act that is a result of the fallen nature of humanity. War should be avoided at all costs but sometimes, again due to our fallen nature, war is inevitable. There are certain rules that should be followed when waging war and the protection of innocent life is one of them.

Orthodox Christians do not hold to the philosophy that there is such thing as a “just war” as developed by Saint Augustine and has been used since the 4th century to wage war in the western world. As I previously stated, wars are not just and if fought all care must be used with the innocent population of the countries. Yes the reality of war is death and that is tragic but collateral damage should be avoided if possible.

I am trying very hard not to choose sides in this conflict and I can see the issue from both sides, although I do not think we truly understand what is going on in the Middle East and I do not think we ever will. I am constantly torn between one country's right to self-protection and another people's right not to be harmed. Innocent human life needs to be protected all along the spectrum of life.

Each of us, regardless of race, color, creed, or nationality are created in the image and likeness of God. Each of us are unique creatures that have been given the Divine Spark of God at our creation. We can argue over when that creation takes place but we need to agree that the Divine Spark does exist in each person. If you are a follower of the Christian religion then you, like me, are commanded by Jesus Christ to love everyone without discrimination. We do not have to love what they do nor do we have to accept it, but we do have to love them as human beings. That is a command and not a suggestion.

During the Orthodox Christian Divine Liturgy that I serve on Sundays in my Church, there is a line where we pray for those who love us and for those who hate us. This is a difficult passage to accept from time to time. How can I pray for those who wish to destroy me? How is it possible for me to pray for someone who has harmed me or my family? It's not easy; in fact I think this is one of, if not the, hardest part of being a Christian not allowing hate to rule me. Again we do not have to accept or even forget what has happened but we do need to forgive and we do need to love all and pray for all.

We have begun a time of intense prayer and fasting in the Orthodox Church that will last until the Feast of the Dormition, the Falling Asleep, of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. I have asked the members of



my Church to join me in prayer for those who are suffering in the Middle East on both sides of the conflicts that have arisen there. Sometimes we feel that we can do nothing and our hands are tied, but we can always pray for all involved regardless of what side you have chosen. We should not rejoice in the destruction of any life regardless of what they have done. My prayer is that peace will come upon all involved but in order for peace to have a chance it needs to begin inside each of us. Pray for those who love you, for those who hate you, for those who have harmed you, and for yourself that you can find peace.