

"Saying peace, peace when there is no peace"

No doubt about it. We love a good fight.

Conflict and intense competition pervade literature, movies, TV news, and hallway gossip. Nothing stirs us up like a clash over premises or power. This is true across cultures and countries. And it is observably true in the Church! The engagement of the opposition and the desire to win can build a strong and welcome sense of urgency and cohesion in allied individuals and groups. There is a compelling thrill when we're in conflict. And that may be why everywhere in the world discord is so prevalent and so potent.

Another reason is that *peacebuilding is such hard work*. It's an uphill challenge to find common ground once positions have hardened, to share empathy when the fires of revenge are raging, or to form an untainted understanding of the other's point of view when our own is so obviously superior. To make matters worse, even when a fragile peace is attained, it can so easily and predictably be disrupted.

We've all been watching the email chatter among different circles of friends and associates on the subject of the war in Iraq. These exchanges include gut wrenching stories of human abuse and degradation, side-splitting humor about the foibles of the opposition, compelling ipso facto appeals to reason that draw out the merits of our position. Of course, "our position" is whichever side of the line a particular network of correspondents has settled on. All of the compelling arguments and illuminating jokes are for the benefit of those who already agree. We seldom intend to be instructive and persuasive to those who are undecided, and certainly not to those among the entrenched opposition. After all, "their minds are made up!"

The way of peace revealed in Scripture and through the heart and teachings of Jesus is neither devoid of conflict nor idyllically easy. It is a hard way because it requires allegiances that transcend our self-interest and cozy enclaves. The promise of our faith and the witness of the saints reveal that the fruits of choosing the harder way are profound joy and fellowship with God and God's family.

Let's pray that together, through the power of God's Spirit, we will find the heart and stamina, the will and grace to follow Jesus and do the things that truly make for peace.

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