

Homily by Bishop Jaime Soto for Sept. 7-8, 2013

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenged the large crowd following him to consider the hard cost of discipleship. His second example comes unnervingly close to us in the light of the events of these recent weeks and looming difficult decisions being considered in the Nation's Capital. The Lord put this parable to his disciples, "What king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?"

A different sort of military calculation now weighs on Congress and the President as well as all the American people. The key word in both Jesus' story and the current diplomatic drama is "successfully". What does it mean to be successful in a military response? With what we know from the years of entanglement in the volatile circumstances of the Middle East, success from a military incursion alone is elusive if not futile.

The horror of chemical weapons against civilian populations demands a response. Indifference to this man-made catastrophe is not an option, but who will suffer the consequences of any American military option. Will punishing the Assad regime persuade its leaders to change? What hopes are there for finding the paths to peace after a military intervention or will the violence only escalate?

There has been much commentary on the growing hegemony of Iran, the nefarious involvements of Al-Qaeda, Putin's obstinate support of the regime, Israel's nervousness and America's standing in the world. Should any of these factors define success or should the fate of the Syria's diverse people be the ultimate measure that matters?

Evil is already being perpetuated in the land where St. Paul once came to know the peace of the Lord Jesus. War is always evil. Is the evil of a military response necessary to prevent the affliction of an even great evil or will we only push the nation into a darker, dimmer dilemma?

These are all anguishing, aching questions but the folded arms of indifference or dismissive shrug of a complacent conscience cannot be abided. America's resolve should be for a peace found through reconciliation. Our efforts must move the parties to that alternative, the only viable alternative.

The first of Jesus' parables in the gospel today is also good to consider, how to build the house. One must consider carefully the costs to do so. What will it cost to build the house of peace in Syria with the lasting foundation of justice and mutual respect? This is the moral calculation that must be made for the sake of Syria, all the nations in the region, as well as the world.

Fasting and prayer may seem like meager means in the shadow of the massive military might. It is our way to bind ourselves to all those who suffer the scourging weapons of war. It is one way to hunger for a peace. May that hunger help us and our leaders find a path of hope for Syria and for ourselves.