

**Homily for the Annual Third Circuit Red Mass
The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A**

November 19, 2023

**Saint Boniface Church
Edwardsville, Illinois**

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, members of the judiciary, fellow attorneys and practitioners of the legal profession, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good to be here at Saint Boniface Church in Edwardsville as we gather to celebrate the Annual Third Circuit Red Mass in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. The name “Red Mass” comes from the red vestments we wear to symbolize the fire of the Holy Spirit, as we pray that our hearts may be inflamed by the desire to pursue justice and truth in our work as members of the legal profession with the inspiration, guidance, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

A principal tenet of our faith is a firm belief in the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. When a war rages, we pray for an end to the hostilities that are taking so many human lives. As we pursue justice and truth in the world, this morning I wish to reflect on the war that began

last month on October 7th with the violent and lethal attack by Hamas that killed 1,200 Israelis, most of them civilians, many of them women and children. In addition, about 240 hostages were taken by Hamas on October 7th.

In addition to our faith, we feel a certain sense of wanting to have the moral high ground in terms of whom we support or oppose. To support an oppressor would be contrary to our faith and to support a terror group is anathema to our sense of morality. We need to do the following two things as a matter of faith, as a matter of humanity, and to show our respect for the sanctity of life.

First, we must educate ourselves as to how and why the war began and how it is being waged. To do this requires some effort to know the history of the combatants and the events which led up to the conflict, as well as their own teachings and politics that compel them to engage in the conflict.

The second thing we must do is process those facts in the light of a moral framework. That sounds complicated, but it means figuring out how to decide who is oppressing whom. Unfortunately, war has plagued humanity since the dawn of time. The biblical roots of animosity between

Jews and Arabs can be traced back to the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible, where it says that Abraham had two sons. The first was Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar, the maidservant of Abraham's wife, Sarah. In their old age, when both Abraham and Sarah thought they were past child-bearing age, Sarah consented for Hagar to bear a son for Abraham so he could have an heir. Later, when Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac, she resented the presence of Hagar and Ishmael and asked them to leave. The Ishmaelites, as they and their people were called, became a nomadic nation who dwelt in the region that is now known as Saudi Arabia.

The name Israel comes from Isaac's son, Jacob, who was renamed "Israel" by God in the Bible. Israel's descendants were enslaved by the Egyptians for hundreds of years before settling in Canaan, which is approximately the region of modern-day Israel.

Some points, therefore, to consider:

1) Jews were in the land of Israel somewhere between 1,600 to 2,000 years before the first Muslims.

2) There were many governments and countries that ruled the land over the centuries since the initial time of Jewish rule, including Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires, who took turns at ruling. The Romans

governed for a while, as well as Byzantine Christians. Then the Arab conquest of some of the area began in the 7th century. Christian and Muslim armies fought for several centuries in battles sometimes referred to as the Crusades. The Mamluks ruled for a time. They were followed by the Ottoman Empire and eventually the British. As the Jews were indigenous to the land and never left their religious, historic, and cultural ties to the land, all those who came after could be considered occupiers. The British renamed the land Palestine. The original "Palestinians" were the Jews. The people we now call Palestinians were known as Arabs. The State of Israel was created in 1948 by an action of the United Nations following the holocaust of millions of Jews in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

3) When Israel was created, the surrounding Arab Nations immediately attacked the Jewish State with the stated goal of destroying it. They also expelled or executed some 700,000 Jews from their countries. It was only after the State of Israel was attacked that some 800,000 Palestinians were displaced or expelled from Israel. However, no Arab country would accept them. They were relegated to live either within Israel or in portions of land which had been set aside for them primarily in what is known as the

West Bank (an area including Jerusalem) and Gaza (subsequently called the Gaza Strip because it is a fairly narrow 25-mile long “strip” of land).

4) The surrounding Arab states have attacked Israel on several other occasions, but these attacks instead resulted in Israel enlarging its borders through capturing territory. These areas were then built upon by Jewish settlers and became known as the “occupied” territories.

5) As Israel continued to occupy those territories, Palestinians became increasingly angered that what they considered their ancestral land was no longer theirs. As a consequence, their leadership has become increasingly hostile to Israel, maintaining their desire to annihilate the Jewish State. Israel has offered a two-state solution on several occasions, but the terms were never acceptable to the Palestinian leadership. Meanwhile, Israel continued to build upon the settlements in the occupied territories and now considers the land their own.

6) Due to feelings of helplessness from a military perspective, Palestinians have resorted to acts of terrorism to address what they perceive as a terrible injustice. The terror attacks and the accompanying uprisings are known as *Intifadas*. This has led to an increasingly harsh rule over Palestinian movements, even in Palestinian areas. This includes travel restrictions and

even blockades when Israel believes weapons are being shipped to the Palestinians. These increasing restrictions on Palestinian freedom have caused even more tension and the cycle of violence continues.

7) All of this culminated in a barbaric and horrific attack on Israeli citizens (the vast majority of whom were civilians) on October 7th, followed shortly thereafter by an Israeli incursion into Gaza with the stated goal of destroying Hamas (the Palestinian governing body) and rescuing the over 200 hostages taken in the attack. The Israeli incursion has killed over 10,000 Palestinians. Although warned by Israel to vacate the area, many did not. Hamas uses civilians as “Human Shields,” increasing the likelihood that civilians will be killed when Israel attacks. The use of human shields is a war crime as defined by the Geneva Conventions. Israel requires the return of the hostages before they will agree to a ceasefire. Hamas will not release the vast majority of the hostages as they represent leverage. In response to the calls for a ceasefire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recalled the Japanese bombing of the American base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, noting that the response of the United States was not a ceasefire, but a declaration of war, which was then fought until the Japanese and Germans surrendered.

8) World opinion is strongly divided about the current situation in Israel and Gaza, but many people believe Israel's response is disproportionate to the October 7th attack, primarily because of the number of civilian casualties.

9) Finally, Hamas continues to refuse to accept the existence of Israel and seeks its annihilation.

What are Christians to make of all this? Our Catholic moral tradition has developed around this issue over the centuries to provide the moral framework we need. While we believe that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and we always pray for peace, that does not necessarily mean that we must be pacifists. Saint Augustine developed a very well-reasoned system called the Just War Theory. The just war theory states the belief that war, while it is terrible but less so with the right conduct, is not always the worst option. Important responsibilities, undesirable outcomes, or preventable atrocities may justify war. Saint Augustine, who lived from 354-430 A.D., was the first clear advocate of the just-war theory, drawing upon the theories of Cicero and Saint Ambrose. Augustine's account was picked up with minor emendations by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), whose own rendering was normative for Catholic theorists from the Middle Ages.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lays out the conditions for just war in paragraph 2309:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.

As the world watches the atrocities of war in horror, this does not mean that the situation is hopeless. As people of faith, we prayerfully entrust this situation to God, that His grace may eventually help enemies to overcome their human hostilities and live in peace.

May God give us this grace. Amen.