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Church leaders on the Middle East crisis: Benedict XVI

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 28, 2006 All Things Catholic

Faced with violence such as that in Lebanon, in which religious differences play a significant role, one temptation for believers is to retreat into a kind of vague humanitarian language, soft-pedaling any confessional approach for fear of making things worse. Some believers worry that striking spiritual notes while the world burns flirts with naiveté; as Woody Allen once put it, if there really is a God, the best that can be said of him is that he?s an under-achiever.

Benedict XVI understands all this. Yet at bottom, he does not buy the premise that a time of crisis should imply a gag order on the gospel. On the contrary, he believes, only its message is capable of offering the world a different path.

His comments during his homily on Sunday, July 23, the day he set aside for prayer and penance for Lebanon, are eloquent testimony of the point.

The pope said:

> *? Today in a multi-cultural and multi-religious world, many are tempted to say: ?It?s better for peace in the world among the religions and the cultures not to speak too much of the specificity of Christianity, that is, of Jesus, of the church, of the sacraments. Let?s be content with those things which can be more or less universal ?? But it?s not true. Precisely in this moment -- in a moment of great abuse of the name of God -- we need the God who triumphs on the Cross, who wins not with violence but with his love. Precisely in this moment we need the face of Christ, to know the true face of God and thereby to carry reconciliation and light to this world. Thus together with love, with the message of love, with all that we can do for the suffering of this world, we must also carry the witness of this God, of the victory of God precisely through the non-violence of his Cross.*
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> Let?s return to where we began. What we can do is to render the witness of love, the witness of faith; above all we can raise a cry to God: we can pray! We are sure that our Father hears the cry of his children. In the Mass, preparing ourselves for Holy Communion, to receive the Body of Christ that unites us, we pray with the church: ?Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and give us peace in our day.? Let this be the prayer of the church in this moment: ?Deliver us from every evil and give us peace.? Not tomorrow or the day after: Lord, peace today! Amen.

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