

Christians on both sides of debate about war and peace
can quote the scriptures to support their position and cause.
In fact, if you're clever enough,
you can use the scriptures to prove just about anything you want.
Of course, that's not using the scriptures well or fairly.
It's called proof-texting
and often involves wrenching a particular verse from its context
and thus twisting its meaning to suit a particular purpose.
A person who is proof-texting often begins by arguing,
"See, it says so - right here in the bible!"

Well, "right here in the bible," today, it says something
we need to grapple with as Christians:
it's not easy stuff - and I'm not proof-texting.

St. Paul is not writing about issues of war and peace here
but he is laying out a foundation for Christian spirituality
that undergirds not just how Christians approach armed conflict,
but how Christians approach God and life in general -
and Paul's approach is not an easy one for us Americans to adopt.

Remember his words?
"I am *content* with weakness, insults, hardships,
persecutions and constraints."

The American ethos is *NOT* content with weakness -
it values strength and muscularity;
it is not content with insults -
it condemns hate speech;
it is not content with hardships -
it encourages pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps;
it is not content with persecutions -
it seeks to protect and promote the persecuted;
it is not content with constraints -
it loosens them with a freedom often bordering on license.

All this and St. Paul goes so far as to say that he gladly **BOASTS**
of his weaknesses so that some**ONE** stronger than himself
might *become* his strength.
(It might be helpful, as we look at Paul's words,
to call to mind, each of us, our own weaknesses, hardships and constraints...)

Paul writes, "When I am weak, then I am strong..."
and this might be more our own experience than we first recognize

Isn't it true that when I admit, acknowledge and accept my own vulnerability

that I render myself open to being helped, strengthened, loved by others?

Who are the most difficult people to love?

Those who believe:

they don't need to be loved, don't need to be helped,
don't need to depend on the strength of others.

It's true: when I *acknowledge* my weaknesses,
I allow, I open myself to the possibility
of being strengthened by love.

If I *deny* my weaknesses, I can close myself off
to what others, including God, might want to offer me.

Just as this is true in St. Paul's relationship with God,
so it is true in all our relationships.

So we might ask ourselves,

- where in our marriages and in our families
do we need to acknowledge our weaknesses
that we might become strong through the love of others?
- how about in our friendships? neighborhoods? at work?
- how might our parish grow stronger, or the church at large,
through acknowledging our weaknesses
and recognizing our need for shared strength?
- how *does* a Christian citizen understand weakness and strength
in light of Paul's words?
- and how in my relationship with God
do I need to be more honest about my weaknesses
not out of guilt, but out of a desire for God to supply
what I do not have of my own strength and reserves?

So deeply did St. Paul trust Christ to be his strength
that he was ready to boast of his weaknesses
- and be content with them!

I'm not sure I'm in that place yet.

But we might start by simply acknowledging some of our weaknesses
and opening our hearts to God and those around us,
understanding that our greatest strength might be ours only
if and when we accept it as a gift, from God and from others.

It was in his greatest weakness on the cross
that Jesus opened himself to the strength of his Father's love.

And Jesus continues to render himself vulnerable to us
in the gift of the eucharist,
where his brokenness become our healing,
where his weakness becomes our strength.

What the Lord spoke to Paul he speaks to us,
"My grace is sufficient for you..."
Come to the table of grace

which offers that strength
which is made perfect in our weakness.

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