

Litany of Repentance for the Fruits of War

LEADER: The following readings are from the book, "War a Force that Gives Us Meaning," by Chris Hedges; a war correspondence for 15 years in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central America.

READER: War finds its meaning in death. The cause is built on the backs of victims, portrayed always as innocent. Indeed, most conflicts are ignited with martyrs, whether real or created. The death of an innocent, one who is perceived as emblematic of the nation or group under attack becomes of initial rallying point for war. The dead become the standard-bearers of the cause and all causes feed off a steady supply of corpses ... The cause, sanctified by the dead, cannot be questioned without dishonoring those who gave up their lives.

PRAYER: *God of Mercy, we pray for all the victims of war and terror around the world and in our own country. Forgive us when we use the memory of these innocents to stoke the flames of hatred and war against others. We pray...*

RESPONSE: God, turn us from the fruits of war.

READER: War makes the world understandable, a black and white tableau of them and us. It suspends thought, especially self-critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort. We are one. Most of us willingly accept war as long as we can fold it into a belief system that paints the ensuing suffering as necessary for a higher good; for human beings seek not only happiness but also meaning. And tragically, war is sometimes the most powerful way in human society to achieve meaning.

PRAYER: *God of Understanding, we pray for the courage and strength to resist the intoxication of war as a means of creating unity and purpose in our nation. We pray for courage to question the unexamined assumptions of war. And so we pray ...*

RESPONSE: God, turn us from the fruits of war.

READER: The myth of war creates a new, artificial reality. Moral precepts—ones we have spent a lifetime honoring—are jettisoned. We accept, if not condone, the maiming and killing of others as the regrettable cost of war. We operate under a new moral code.

PRAYER: *God of Justice, we pray for the wisdom to see beyond the propaganda of war and the rationalizations that make torture acceptable; that make the abandonment of the rule of law reasonable; and that make the violation of civil and human rights a necessity. And so we pray ...*

RESPONSE: God, turn us from the fruits of war.

READER: The imagined heroism, the vision of a dash to rescue a wounded comrade, the clear lines we thought were drawn in battle, the images we have of our own reaction under gunfire, usually wilt in combat. This is a sober and unsettling realization. We may not be who we thought we would be. One of the most difficult realizations of war is how deeply we betray ourselves, how far we are from the image of gallantry and courage we desire, how instinctual and primordial fear is.

PRAYER: *God and Healer of our every wound, we pray for the young and idealistic men and women who answer the call to serve their country in the military. We pray for those whose idealism is crushed by the realities of war and whose dreams are haunted by the horror of combat. And so we pray ...*

RESPONSE: God, turn us from the fruits of war.

READER: The small acts of decency ... in wartime ripple outwards like concentric circles. These acts, unrecognized at the time, make it impossible to condemn, legally or morally an entire people. They serve as reminders that we all have a will of our own, a will that is independent of the state or the nationalist cause. Most important, once the war is over, these people make it hard to brand an entire nation or an entire people as guilty.

PRAYER: *God of Compassion, we pray for those, who in the midst of war find ways to reach cross the divisions of enemies and friends, to embrace the humanity of the other. Give us the courage to embrace those who have been designated as our enemies. And so we pray ...*

RESPONSE: God, turn us from the fruits of war.

Written by Tom Cordaro, with excerpts from "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning," by Chris Hedges, published by Public Affairs, the Perseus Book Group, New York, NY, 2002