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- *Resolving conflict in the world*
- *Turning inward and living by faith*

[Note: USA considering invading Iraq]

God's grace of courage and conviction, forgiveness and humility, is contained within each of your lives at this time. You gather as a group when you can for the purpose of finding answers.

You seek...you wish to find,
You ask...you wish to learn,
You cry out...and you wish for comfort,
You challenge...and you wish for insight.

You proceed through your lives constantly with the hope and sometimes the conviction that God is with you every step along the way. In a life filled with challenges, a life each of you experiences, there come times when you seek renewal, when you seek a sense of balance among the community filled with confusion. You seek quiet within when all around you cry out. You seek stability when it seems only chaos abounds. You seek compassion when life around you is dominated by self-interest. You seek renewal when you feel spent.

It is at times like this that your guides can be brought more intimately into your daily lives. We are not occasionally with you; we are *always* with you. There is no time when you are separated from God because there is no time that you are away from us. It is your guides that bring God to your life, just as it is you who bring God to the life around you. When you seek solace, when you seek comfort, when you seek renewal, your guides are empowered to answer those prayers spoken and unspoken.

We see each of you concerned about the future—the future of the world, the future of your nation, the future of your communities and your own future. You are experiencing a period in human history that is most unique. Rarely do countries consider actions against other nations within a public forum. So often the leadership of nations decide among themselves what needs to be done and the citizens of those nations are informed after the fact. There is much that is occurring that is outside public view, but the dialog that is currently surrounding your lives is a dialog that is very self-searching: what must be done, when must it be done, how must it be done. What is missing from much of the public dialog is “why must it be done.”

The experience of hearing all of this discussion is unique because at some level each individual is participating in the dialog. Everyone has an opinion. The opinion may or may not be based upon thorough knowledge, but it is nevertheless an opinion. With so many points of view being expressed, how is it possible for you as individuals and as a collective group to know what is the right path? Once you know the right path, how can you make that way effective and meaningful, consequential?

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You already know of the necessity of affirming the dignity of all life. If you fully accept the meaning of dignity and understand its implications, you are on the right path. The proper way is the way that affirms that mutual dignity. Once you know the path to take, it requires enormous courage as well as commitment to stand by that commitment, to stand by that knowledge, and help bring a resolution to the fore. This will not be the last challenge that people must face concerning the dignity of other nations, but it is a valuable opportunity for all to learn what it means to affirm others. It is very easy for you to affirm those with whom you agree, and it is enormously difficult to acknowledge that affirmation toward those with whom you strongly disagree. The importance of mutual affirmation becomes increasingly evident when it involves two perspectives that seem at first glance to be opposite one another.

The strife, the turmoil, the anxiety that is associated with the Middle East is not a new phenomenon in human history. All nations viewing others with suspicion feel a sense of self-righteousness. All nations are indignant when they perceive others to have no respect or little regard for what they hold to be true. That is the nature of conflict. It is motivated by self-interest, regional interest, national interest, and there is no regard for what is best collectively. Too often your government employs the expression "in our nation's interest" as a blanket justification for anything it chooses to do. You are fully aware of that rhetoric, but the perception of the world as "*our* best interests" and opposed to "*their* best interests" is as old as human history. You are aware of it because of the public dialog, but it has existed far too long as it is.

When you have a disagreement with another individual, you do not justify your disagreement by saying "it is in *my* best interest that such-and-such has to be done." Likewise, one nation cannot use the same argument as its own justification. All individuals must recognize this illogical way of relating to others. It is destructive, it goes against what God would wish, it goes against all recognized religious institutional thinking. Each party to the debate, one country against another, uses the same arguments and it gets nowhere. By telling your neighbor, "it's in my best interest that you do something," you are setting that neighbor in a defensive posture where that individual says "it is in *my* best interest to take a particular stance." Each of you understands that such attitudes do not lead to a resolution of disagreements and prejudices.

Where do you go when you feel so helpless about changing such intransigence? Each of you must first look within yourselves prayerfully and rid your own selves of those actions and prejudices and opinions that can be characterized as "in my best interest." For only by eliminating "*my* best interest" can you begin to take steps to eliminate "in *our* best interest." It is a large step to move toward collective, worldwide, "*humanity's* best interests," but that is the direction which ultimately must be followed.

None of you by yourselves can change the course of history, but you can in very definite and beneficial ways change the effect that history has upon you. It is in

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changing the effect that history has upon you that you begin to alter the future. You know this on a personal scale. When you attempt something that fails, you learn from that attempt, you learn from that history, and you take what you learn and apply it to the present. If a relationship between two individuals fails, you must learn from that failure. It then no longer really is a failure. It can be viewed as a step toward success. First you must learn; then you can act. First you understand the impact of history upon you; then you can act upon the present and thereby participate meaningfully in the future. The future is guided through your response to the present.

Your view of life around you is influenced by your understanding of your life within. Feeling in direct contact with your spiritual selves strengthens you for dealing with life on the outside, and the nature of that response to life on the outside has an impact on life beyond your immediate circle.

What do you do when surrounded by the chaos that echoes so loudly throughout your society? Turn inward, turn inward and examine who you are, what do you stand for, what is really important that reflects God's presence. Based on your understanding of God, you will be empowered to do what you can do. Your actions are informed by your faith. Faith is not necessarily a precognition of what will happen. Faith is a belief in what is important and what can influence the present and therefore the future. You must learn to live by faith alone. It is faith that provides sustenance. It is your faith to which you withdraw for refreshment, for insight, for understanding, for courage, for the conviction to act. Your faith stands absolutely at the center of who you are. It is your faith that provides the impetus to what you do.

Your understanding of your spiritual selves is guided by your faith, for first comes faith—then comes understanding. If you reverse the process and insist upon understanding as the starting point, faith will not be forthcoming, for you will wish to have definitive perception, complete knowledge before acting. If you accept your faith, your faith makes you strong. Strength from faith results in insight and action.

You believe you have a soul because you have faith in that soul. You do not have faith in the soul because you felt the soul, because you saw the soul, because you touched it. There is nothing concrete in the soul. First comes the faith and then the vision of your soul. You are here as a group because you seek an understanding of your soul, you seek an understanding of life and your place within it. That is the goal but you are here first because you have faith that there is a soul. You have faith that there will be understanding. You have faith that with understanding will come action. It is the faith that begins the process. There is no mystery to this faith. You have only to be open to it.

Your faith for each of you is there for the asking. If you pray for faith, you are recognizing the belief, the hope of a divinity that resides within, of a divine knowledge, of a divine purpose, of a divine understanding, of divine action. You have faith in that. Allow your faith to open as a rose opens to sunlight. When the rose is open,

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nourishment enters. When your faith is open, *you* are open. If you have no faith, the knowledge you seek will not be forthcoming.

In times of worry, concern, anxiety, when you need to withdraw, when you need a place of solace, find your faith. It will give you refreshment. It will give you peace. It will give you courage, and it will give you a firm conviction of God's presence at your very side forever.

You are blessed by your faith. You are blessed by your vision of that faith, your accepting of it. Allow your faith to be a divine resource, a divine place of recovery, of rest and inspiration.

Amen.