I write this essay in the shadow of the United States responding to the Assad regime and ISIS with deadly bomb attacks on strongholds in Syria and Afghanistan, respectively. I was numb during Holy Week, 2017, as I reflected on my country’s deadly responses to our opponents.

What were Jesus’ messages to his followers from the time of his resurrection to his ascension? “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” John 20: 21b (Second Sunday of Easter); “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,’” John 14:6 (Fifth Sunday of Easter); “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” John 14:15 (Sixth Sunday of Easter); “Go therefore and make disciples of nations,” Matthew 28:19 (Ascension of the Lord).

Jesus, who was unjustly arrested, scourged, and crucified, did not respond with vengeance to his oppressors. His words and actions during the Easter season are not those of “gotcha-ism.” According to the scriptures of this season, he never fought back nor did he deride his enemies. As I reflect on his example to us during this season, especially in the context of the cold war between the United States and Syria, the United States and ISIS, and the United States and North Korea, I am reminded of the provocative bumper sticker, “Who would Jesus bomb?”

In addition to the threads of the entire Easter season, I am particularly moved by Jesus’ response in today’s First Reading, “...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” Acts of the Apostles 1: 8b (emphasis added). Jesus raises the bar; just as he did not limit the spread of the Gospel to the people of Judea or Samaria, but rather challenged his followers to evangelize all people, do we consider those outside of our parish, our Congressional district, our state, our nation, our religious family, worthy of God’s love and our efforts to evangelize? Do we advocate as strongly for a drought stricken Somali or education poor Afghani youth as we do the young neighbor in the pew in front of us making his or her first communion this month?

As we approach the end of the Easter season, I invite you to reflect on John Slattery’s “The Frailty of Easter.” As you preach on the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, ask yourself “How was this Easter season unique for me?” and “How can I inspire my congregants to faithfully tie together the words and actions of Jesus and the first Christian community in order to bring the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth?”

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