

ADVENT 2010:

Whose Children Are These? The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers and U.S. Veterans Share Their Stories

First Sunday of Advent
Sunday, November 28th, 2010
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
New York, NY

Opening Meditation

by Mike Uca-Dorn

Please remain strong and brave, we will endure this together, with you. If it's beyond enduring, please call us. Life will pass, but if it's beyond enduring, you must call us.

These words that I've just spoken are not from a religious leader reaching out to a parishioner in distress. These are Ali's words, a 14-year-old Afghan boy and member of the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers who was responding on a phone call to another boy in Gaza as he recalled the pain of losing his uncle after a bombing. Living over half of their lives under occupation and in a war zone, these Afghan youth know firsthand about losing family members to war. But these youth also know firsthand the witness they are making worldwide with their Journey to Smile campaign, a simple yet profound belief in that by mobilizing enough people in the sharing of compassion to each other, that people worldwide will become more humane and peaceful.

Enter U.S. veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Bryan Casler, Frances Wiedenhoft, Brock McIntosh, Jake Diliberto, and Josh Stieber. Each of them, like Ali, has their own story, their own pain of losing those who are like family to them. Some are pacifists and some are not, regardless, they all have spoken publicly for peace and for this war to end.

The vital voices of the children and the veterans are drowned out by the 24 hour news cycle: Interview after interview fills the air waves with network news military advisors offering their two cents on strategy while C-SPAN airs the Congressional debate on the war's policy with rare appearances of those who have been touched by the fighting. In the season of Advent, our communities are called to vigil for the coming of the Christ Child, the Prince of Peace, into our midst. Our Gospel readings command us to 'make straight paths' and to 'keep watch' for the one who is to come. Like John the Baptist we are invited 'to prepare the way for the Lord.' We have in this Advent series of historic conversations the opportunity to en flesh these commands by praying in wait with these young people who have suffered most profoundly in war. As we await the birth of the Christ Child we ask: *Whose Children Are These?*