obligation must not overtly undermine a duly elected and substantially just government? Are we not only children of God, but also in some respect children of the country and as such have an obligation to give the government the benefit of doubt?

Even if you as a priest cannot agree with the government's actions can you not allow the faithful the peace of conscience to make the moral decision themselves without berating them from the altar? Is it not true that because of your higher calling to serve the Lord in an ordained state you are called to a different level of obligation than the faithful?

In defense of your sermon, I recognize that with Prayer all things are possible. I also concur that you and I wish this difficulty would go away. God can do anything, however Scripture and Tradition have taught us that God usually requires us to cooperate with His Love in search of a greater Good. We all must search for a more perfect Peace that is arrived at by free will of the persecuted and the protector and one that is sought to give greater glory to the Lord’s demand for justice for all. I contend Gideon, Saul, David, Charlemagne, the many Saint warriors and my fellow Marines of today were called to defend the rights of their citizens and neighbors to live in Peace without the threat of personal destruction. No just government that has the means and intention to act on behalf of the ultimate good of the oppressed can intentionally permit the killing of the innocent whether it is the un-born or the Kurdish peasant. St. Thomas Aquinas, other Fathers of the Church and Catholic teaching instruct the faithful that at times after peaceful means to resolve the issue are exhausted the Lord allows for the sword to prevent a great evil.

New Orleans, a tale of two cities, is not so different than that written about by the famous English author, Charles Dickens. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...” Dickens wrote about tumultuous times full of strife, hope, despair and new life.

In New Orleans, one huge swath of the city is so devastated that much of the press, Caucasian politicians and many of those inhabitants of the other half of the city wish the night mare associated with the devastated portion would disappear from their consciousness. Now one can hardly blame the more fortunate inhabitants; the hurricane did not leave them unscarred: rather it ripped roofs off, felled trees, destroyed walls and siding. The survivors suffered the loss of their income when businesses where they worked were closed and unable to open due to lack of help and enough contractors to repair the damage. Most of the lucky ones still had to face the reality that their children had no place to go to school because up through March only but twenty-one of the 170 public schools were operating and many of the remainder will never open. The more fortunate ones needed to cope with the daily uncertainty of not knowing if the levees would be repaired in time for the next wave of hurricanes, or if their soon-to-be-repaired home would be insurable or declared eligible for a mortgage if they wished to sell.

How would you respond if you as a white or non-black Catholic family trying to assist those less fortunate hears their Mayor declare this “city is going to be a Chocolate City” and then is reelected. Daily you read the Governor blames all the pre- and post-Katrina problems on the President, while Federal Agencies and Congress blame foul-ups on the Governor, during which the main newspapers spew out bad news after bad news in the city and nation. You too might say, please do not tell me of all the sorrow, misery, hopelessness and sadness of the hundreds of thousands of individuals who, as a result of Katrina and levee destruction, live in a war-like zone. For many attempting to cope it is too much to deal with the realization that one half of the city has no home or family unit intact under one roof. Churches and Prayer Halls are either destroyed or so damaged as to be unable to function to allow the unfortunate ones to console one another as they praise the Lord.

“...the Second is Like It (the First) You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”
– Mathew 22-39
Those citizens in the less devastated area are by their actions saying “Please do not remind us about those people who had every automobile they owned ruined in the flood, all the public transportation in their area disrupted, and no grocery stores left open within their area. It is too painful to reflect on the fact that those devastated humans on the other half of the city possess no photographs of their children’s first steps, Baptisms, Graduation ceremonies, Grandmas and Granddads in happier days and family photos of Christmas and festive gatherings. No wonder the lucky ones try to focus on their issues and beg not to be reminded that the other part of their city is desolate, in ruins.

Mardi gras and Caesar-like circus sporting events are somewhat like catatonic denials that this could have happened. So many of the souls in the devastated areas are in shock, in a daze, and still unable to take even the most simple steps to pull out of their predicament. For the most part, with few exceptions, much of the rebuilding of the 9th ward and other trashed areas is still very much the same nine months after Katrina. Oh, the streets have been cleared of much of the trash, bulldozers are tearing down buildings and here and there lights are being turned on, but few have had the will, resources or strength to rebuild.

Many who live thousands of miles away do not wish to hear about the plight of our mostly black brethren. It has been reported that members of various Catholic men’s groups respond to call for help by reciting facts about their contributions to national charities and in several instances have actively opposed hands on assistance to the unfortunate souls in New Orleans, pleading it isn’t in their mission statement. We, as One Catholic member said “have other projects closer and the situation of our Catholic brothers of New Orleans is no longer our concern.” Calls for assistance and prayers prior to the new hurricane season are met with silence or quizzical stares indicating the spokesperson for the helpless is somewhat daft in the head for bringing up such a subject that is 9 months old.

As in most instances of tragedy a light shines in the darkness. In the case of New Orleans, a single contractor by the name of Leo Flores, representing the Community of Catholic Men of St. Patrick’s church in Carlsbad, California, left his profitable business and with great loss of income and personal comfort has spent the past five months repairing priests’ homes, battered women’s shelters, caregivers’ homes, Catholic schools, and all projects requested of him. When the support of the men’s groups ceased, he took out personal loans and placed his own assets up for sale in order to continue his works of mercy. This man did not complain and ask why others wouldn’t continue their help; rather he accepted the cross with joy and to this moment continues with the work of the Lord.

Leo, working in the Catholic vineyard of New Orleans, knows no color of skin, knows no dogma, knows not of the Apostles creed, for you see, he is of no proclaimed faith. All this carpenter/contractor knows is Love Thy Neighbor.

God in his wisdom has dispatched the Blessed Mother to New Orleans to comfort the faithful and as I write this commentary, I am being told of many visions and appearances of the Blessed Mother and around the city. One chapel dedicated to Mary has reports of multiple miracles of healing and other unexplained gifts to those in crisis.

It will take five to ten years for the scars of Katrina to fade. All residents have need of our prayers; they have suffered and continue to suffer with not only physical loss but also serious apprehension of the future. Take a moment each day and include them in your chat with the Lord.

“For God Did Not Send His Son Into the World to Condemn the World, But That the World be Saved Through Him” – John 3, 17