

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

CRABBY OLD MEN — Almost every neighborhood has a crabby old man living there. He is the one who throws a fit if kids are playing with a ball, and it lands even one foot in his yard. If he is a certified crabby old man, he has honed the skill of getting the ball and keeping it before even the fastest kid can retrieve it. In my first parish, there was a certified COM who lived across the side street from the parish playground. I think he won a blue ribbon at the county fair for being the fastest at getting the ball and cussing out the kids with the bluest language. Over time, he'd cuss out the kids if a ball landed in the curb in front of his yard. As he aged, his rheumatism stole his speed, and the kids were getting the ball back. One day at recess, he stood on his front porch with a shot gun, yelling at the kids that he would "take care" of them if they came near his house. Of course, the principal called the police, and the police talked to him. They then told the principal that the COM had made no direct threat, and to make sure no children went in his yard, which of course, she did. While the kids hated losing the ball, they all stayed alive.

Unfortunately, not all COM stories end without fatalities. There is a cable TV show called *Fear Thy Neighbor*, which reports on neighborhood feuds that end in tragedy. Some episodes are about COM and a neighbor, both of whom feel that the other is wrong. (They basically all have the same plot.) After a series of slights by one side or another, yelling, name calling, and threats are made. Neither side is willing to talk because both sides see from only their individual perspectives. Both parties stoop to the lowest level. Then, after months of antagonizing, one party has "had enough" and shoots the other party. One family mourns the death of a loved one (in some cases children); the other family is destroyed by the bread winner serving prison time. But, at least the problem is gone, but at the cost of a human life!

You might be thinking, "What's his point?"

Well, the point is this. On a global scale, the COM (which can stand for Crazy Old Man, too)

could be seen as North Korea. (Of course, North Korea would say the COM is the USA.) The fight between them and us has been going on for decades, and has been controlled by a diplomatic firm hand, balanced by patience and a wider vision. Now we seem to deal with it by the leaders threatening and name calling on both sides. Clearly the threat of nuclear weapons has inflamed the dire situation. However, there needs to be one side that acts like the rational person, not offering the other side gist for the "Well, he said..." or "Well, he called me..." mill. This does not mean that our nation should just ignore the situation or avoid making clear the consequences. Our nation has a responsibility to protect ourselves and our allies. It is a major risk to keep antagonizing someone who is not mentally stable.

The reason why I am addressing this political issue is that the interactions of governments have moral implications, especially when their actions can lead to war. Even if one wants to use the classical Roman Catholic *just war* approach to armed conflict, that approach *has always* taught that, at best, war might be a necessary evil, and leaders of nations must do all in their power to resolve the conflict justly before ever resorting to violence. One nation cannot provoke another nation to attack, and then claim there is just cause for retaliation. In the end, one nation may say that the problem has been destroyed, but like the neighbors, only after claiming lives (probably hundreds of thousands of them).

While this can all be true, what can we do about it? The first thing, but by no means the only thing, is to pray and do penance – giving up something, doing acts of charity, more time in prayer – for a peaceful resolution to the situation. The second is to notify political leaders that this approach is dangerous and immoral. The third is to look and see how each of us deals with conflicts, so that we are not perpetuating a culture of such destructive behavior.

First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. (1 Timothy 2: 1)