

## *CRIBBS NOTES – September 23, 2007*

What are we supposed to do when government leaders don't listen to the electorate? When the voices of the people are not heard and public servants ignore the public? What are we to do when public funds are squandered on wars and human lives are wasted on highfaluting folly? How do we pray in these days when nations turn their backs on God?

In Lafayette Park across the street from the White House, a man and woman have set up an encampment since 1981. This week I met William Thomas, a bearded sage, who decided the only thing that really mattered to him was to convince national leaders to end the arms race by disarming nuclear weapons.

Sitting outside a tattered, sheeted covering that barely sheltered him from the weather and next to photographs of disfigured children, Thomas talked to me about their campaign to draw attention to their cause. His female companion, Concepcion Picciotto, recently turned 71 years old and remains stubbornly committed to their purpose.

“How have you managed to stay here all these years without giving up?” I asked.

“I have no place else to go,” Thomas said. “I was forced to come back to the United States against my will. So, this is where I need to be.”

Thomas explained he had traveled to Europe and the Middle East before returning to the United States. Earlier in his life, he had been a businessman in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with his wife when he decided to detach himself from money and all material goods. He began a pilgrimage that took him to England. There he said he tossed his wallet with his social security card in it and his passport into a river. He said he never wanted to return to the United States. However, while walking through Dover, he was stopped by police and asked to produce identification papers. His visa had expired and he was deported to America.

Upon arrival at Kennedy International Airport in New York, Thomas said he refused to walk off the plane. He was forcefully carried off the aircraft by police. Once off the plane and inside the airport, he was told he was free to go. He headed straight to Washington, DC, and set up his protest booth. He's been there ever since.

Thomas and Concepcion have small voices. Their photographs are ghastly but poignant. The devastating assault of radiation exposure on human beings is graphically displayed along with scribbled signs calling for an end to war and nuclear weapons.

Who is listening to Thomas and Concepcion?

Our conversation was brief, perhaps five minutes. Thomas was clear, calm, and focused as he outlined his reasons for continuing his vigil in sight of the United States President's residence.

1981. 26 years later he considers himself a “man without a country,” trapped in a nation where he disagrees with its policies and priorities. Thomas and Concepcion have determined to offer themselves as a living presence and public witnesses for an alternative to violence and global conflagration.

In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul urged his young student to first pray for rulers and people in high positions so the faithful could live in peace. In these days, we are encouraged to pray for our political leaders.

We pray that their hearts, minds, eyes, and ears will be opened to the small voices like Thomas and Concepcion. We pray in the name of Jesus for an end to notions of

perpetual war and the escalation of weapons, both nuclear and conventional. In the name of Jesus we pray for a nation in need of compassion and humility. And, I pray for Concepcion and Thomas; that one day soon they will be able to pack up their tent, tear down their photographs, and celebrate a new era free of nuclear arms and contesting countries. We pray to become a people of peace, justice, and goodwill in the name of Jesus. Amen.