

## **Death Penalty / Proposition 62 Homily Helps**

### **Scripture:**

God ensures that death will not be inflicted upon Cain who has killed his brother Abel. In this passage, God says: "If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold'.... So the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone should kill him at sight" Genesis 4:15  
I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. Deut. 30;19

"As I live, says the Lord God, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live". Ezekiel 33:11

"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." John 8:7

### **Faith views:**

"It is an offence against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person, which contradicts God's plan for man and society, and his merciful justice, and impedes the penalty from fulfilling any just objective. It does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance." —Pope Francis

"There is discussion in some quarters about the method of killing, as if it were possible to find ways of 'getting it right'. ... But there is no humane way of killing another person." — Pope Francis

"The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development. . . This conviction has led me from the beginning of my ministry to advocate at different levels the global abolition of the death penalty. — Pope Francis before US Congress, 2015

"The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil." —Pope John Paul II

"Man" and "sinner" are two different things. God made man; man made himself sinner. So, destroy what man made but save what God made. Thus, do not go so far as to kill the criminal, for in wishing to punish the sin, you are destroying the man. Do not take

away his life; leave him the possibility of repentance. Do not kill so that he can correct himself. —St. Augustine

The purpose of punishment is retribution, rehabilitation, and deterrence. The first is more appropriately left to divine punishment and the aim of human punishment is more appropriately medicinal. — St. Thomas Aquinas

We maintain that abolition of the death penalty would promote values that are important to us as citizens and as Christians. First, abolition sends a message that we can break the cycle of violence, that we need not take life for life, that we can envisage more humane and more hopeful and effective responses to the growth of violent crime. — U.S. Catholic Bishops, Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980

For the Church to be consistently and credibly "pro-life", it must also stand in opposition to capital punishment. In upholding this position, we recognize that we are clearly in the minority and that an overwhelming majority of Californians, and even Catholics, support the death penalty. Nonetheless, moral and ethical principles cannot and will not be dictated by public opinion polls. We must stand firm in this belief. — Cardinal Roger Mahony, Statement on the Use of the Death Penalty, 1992

"A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary." — Pope John Paul II, Missouri, January 27, 1999

"Whenever he (Darrell Meese) is executed, the state must know that what it is doing is morally wrong." — Pope John Paul II's Spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valis, 1999

Capital Punishment is the opposite of Baptism: it is slowly taking a person out of the human family. — Sister Helen Prejean, 1995

However, as a community of faith we must ask ourselves; does killing the criminal really restore dignity and honor to the victim? Does another violent act really enhance the lives of a victim's family? Is capital punishment a truly constructive or appropriate method of dealing with crime? The Bishops' answer to these questions is no. In fact, in their Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, our pastoral leaders raise a very

good question: "Why do we kill people who killed people, to show that killing is wrong?"  
—Andy Rivas

The California Catholic Bishops support the repeal of the death penalty. They write "We appeal to Californians to end a failed system of justice and choose life. Violence does not end violence. Killing in the name of the state will not end killing. The death penalty will not give us justice worthy of a good society. Respectfully, we call upon all Californians of good will to move toward a restorative justice that helps transform a culture of death into a culture of life."

Jeanne Woodford, the former warden of San Quentin prison writes, "My Roman Catholic upbringing had great influence on my thinking about the death penalty. I was taught to have respect for God's creation. I have always been morally against the death penalty but I was not passionate about my position. I carried out 4 executions. At the end of every execution a member of my staff would ask, "Is the world safer because of what we did tonight?" We knew the answer was no."

One noteworthy example of a delayed conversion began with a rapist's brutal attack on an eleven-year-old girl. When she resisted him, the twenty-year-old assailant stabbed her fourteen times and left her to die. Had he not been a minor himself, he would have received the death penalty for his heinous crime. Instead, his sentence was 30 years' imprisonment. During his first three years behind bars, the murderer remained unrepentant and even hostile to a visiting priest. But after a visit from the local bishop and a dream in which his victim forgave him, he repented and resolved to lead an exemplary life. After serving his full sentence, he sought the forgiveness of the victim's family and the parish community before becoming a lay brother of the Order of Capuchin Franciscans. By now you may have guessed that his victim was St. Maria Goretti, and his name was Alessandro Serenelli. He later had the unique honor of attending the canonization of the child saint whom he had martyred. Had Alessandro been executed, the story would have had a tragically different ending.

**Victims:**

I can remember so clearly, when my father died, thinking, "I hope they don't kill the man who killed him." I can remember lying in bed and praying, "Please, God, please don't let them kill him." I didn't want any other family to have to go through what our family was going through. That was an instinctive reaction, not a tutored one. But I am pleased to know that someone I hold in great esteem shared it: my father. "Whenever any American's life is taken by another American unnecessarily," he said, "whether it is done

in the name of the law or in defiance of law, by one man or a gang, in cold blood or in passion, in an attack of violence or in response to violence - whenever we tear at the fabric of life which another man has painfully and clumsily woven for himself and his children, the whole nation is degraded.” — M. Kerry Kennedy, daughter of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy

Marietta Jaeger’s 7 years old daughter Susie was kidnapped and killed. She writes, “I am an all-or-nothing person and that meant either all life is sacred and none of it is. As a Catholic Christian, the former was the value and guide I chose. What also concerned me was how I could best honor my daughter’s precious memory. I felt that to kill someone in her name would profane and violate the sweetness, innocence and loveliness of her life.”

Teresa Flores’ only son was killed and the prosecutor asked her to assist in getting the death penalty for the murderer. She simply said, “And break another mother’s heart. There is no way I will help you do that.”

Debbie was kidnapped and raped repeatedly over several days. Her boyfriend was shot in the head and left for dead. She escaped and her assailant was eventually caught and sentenced to death for some murders he had committed. When asked how she felt after his execution she said, “We sing ‘Amazing Grace’ not ‘Amazing Justice.’ Justice did nothing to heal me - forgiveness did.” —Debbie Morris

### **Economics:**

Since reinstating the death penalty in 1978, California taxpayers have spent roughly \$4 billion to fund a dysfunctional death penalty system that has carried out no more than 13 executions. — Judge Arthur L. Alarcón\* & Paula M. Mitchell\*\* 2011

Over 90% of those on death row across the country were too poor to afford their own attorney.

Studies by states across the country show that a county’s budget plays a role in who lives and who dies. A similar murder might get death in one county but not in a nearby county because that county does not have the extra money needed for a death penalty trial.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation stated that each individual execution costs \$186,886.00 based on 2005 estimates.

If the Governor commuted the sentences of those remaining on death row to life without parole, it would result in an immediate savings of \$170 million per year, with a savings of \$5 billion over the next 20 years.

The additional cost of confining an inmate to death row, as compared to the maximum security prisons where those sentenced to life without possibility of parole ordinarily serve their sentences, is \$90,000 per year per inmate.

**Miscellaneous:**

- 156 death row inmates have been exonerated since 1973 in the United States. Three of them were in California
- Execution creates another set of victims: the family and friends of the person who was executed.
- The death penalty is not a deterrent to crime. A Dade County study found that there was an increase in the murder rate after an execution.
- Executions have a detrimental effect on the prison staff. A CDCR lieutenant who taken part in all 13 executions, was put on permanent medical leave due to work-related PTSD.