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Diocese of Owensboro Priests Call for End to Capital Punishment

We, the undersigned Roman Catholic Priests in the Diocese of Owensboro, call upon the lawmakers of the Commonwealth of Kentucky to heed the voice of the many people who ask that the death penalty no longer be used as a punishment for crime.

We recognize the duty of the State to protect its citizens from being victimized by crime, and therefore its right to use the appropriate means to do so, even the death penalty. But we also insist that here, today, recourse to this barbaric and severe punishment is not necessary and cannot be justified. Deny criminals parole, if you must, assign them labor, but do not kill!

The overcrowding of prisons would seem to indicate that the threat of death does not effectively deter crime. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the death penalty, like abortion, contributes to giving the root to a frightening culture of death. And even if it could be shown that the death penalty helps to protect the common good and deters crime at what price?

Who is not filled with *shame* and *anxiety* at the all too familiar carnival atmosphere that characterizes the death watch outside the prison on the day of an execution? Shame that Americans could be filled with barbaric glee by someone's death. Anxiety that such occasions chip away at our nobility as a people, at our moral fiber, and at the value of life itself.

Furthermore, how can putting criminals to death be seen as providing them the opportunity to make amends to society for their offenses against justice or most especially to amend their own lives? In this life penalties should be remedial rather than retributive, because human nature is not incurably evil once it has fallen from the right path. "As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11)

As responsible Christian citizens, we make appeal to lawmakers to put an end to the use of the death penalty because our belief in the sacredness of all human life will allow us to stand idle no longer. But we also make appeal to our fellow Christians, who are either indifferent to or look favorably on the death penalty, to repent and change their hearts. Remember that the just and merciful God meted out punishment to Cain for killing his brother, but he also put a mark on Cain lest anyone should kill him at sight (cf. Gen. 4:15). Not even the worst offender forfeits the right to life, or human dignity or the blessing of divine love.

Hear the voices of the Lord Jesus Christ telling us not to seek vengeance on those who harm us, and that the mark of perfection is to love our enemies and to pray for our persecutors. Jesus reminds us that He will take personally whatever we do-good or evil-to the least of our brethren, such as those who are imprisoned (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

We are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus who, motivated by the folly of love, not only forgave, His tormentors, but even took their place: Innocence itself dying for the guilty to make amends for their offenses against Him. Imagine.

We hate the injustice of crime, but we do not hate the criminal. We do not oppose the punishment of the guilty offender, but rather only a sentence which is unwarranted. Which is why we implore: for the love of God and neighbor, end the use of the death penalty now!

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