

What would justice for bin Laden have looked like?

The column “Vengeance is not justice for bin Laden,” by Jesuit Father William J. Byron (CR, June 2) should have defined justice and vengeance to distinguish the difference.

Justice to others is defined in Section 1807 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church as “Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.” The Catechism in Section 2302 quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, to address vengeance, “ ‘To desire vengeance in order to do evil to someone who should be punished is illicit,’ but it is praiseworthy to impose restitution ‘to correct vices and maintain justice.’”

I believe that jubilation at bin Laden’s death is not restitution. However, Father Bryon should first have asked why so many were willing to risk a grave sin of hatred. To help him ponder that question, consider that a live capture also would have required violence. Father Byron praised nonviolence. He used the insulting statement of “kill first and ask questions later.” The first three-quarters of the column were great, but the concluding attitude of moral and intellectual superiority did not engender trust in a bloodless solution. Father Byron should have discussed what justice for bin Laden would have looked like, so that those who suffered from bin Laden’s evil would have been satisfied with the restitution. He needed to distinguish between justice and vengeance.