

## Catholic Teachings On The Death Penalty: Part One

Materials: Class sets of The Bible, The Catechism, and *Evangelium Vitae* P 56.

Objectives: The student will name one of the two bible verses where the fifth commandment is found. The student will name the three effects of punishment listed in CCC P#2266. The student will name the two reasons in CCC P#2267 why bloodless means of punishment are better. The student will state in which cases John Paul II declared it a necessity to use the death penalty.

### Procedures:

**Review/Anticipatory Set:** *"We have previously used Catholic teachings to evaluate moral issues. How do we assess The Catholic Church's teachings on such issues?"* Review using The Bible, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, and Encyclicals of the Popes as the sources for Catholic teaching.)

**Overview:** *"Today we will use these tools to evaluate The Catholic Church's teachings on the death penalty."*

### **Presentation:**

1. *"The first source of teaching we will look at is Sacred Scripture. Open your Bibles to Exodus 20. Which verse in chapter 20 is the fifth commandment?"* (Answer is Exodus 20:13) *"Does the fifth commandment appear anywhere else in the Old Testament?"* (Answer: Deuteronomy 5:17) Briefly review the fifth commandment: You shall not kill.
2. *"Let's look at what the Catechism says about the Ten Commandments in general. Turn to paragraph 2070".* Read P 2070 with the students and pay particular attention to:  
"They bring to light the essential duties, and therefore, indirectly, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person... From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue."  
Direct the students to paragraph 2072 and read the paragraph. Pay particular attention to :  
"Since they express man's fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, **grave** obligations."  
Discuss the relationship between natural law and the Ten Commandments. Discuss each person's responsibility to follow natural law and the Ten Commandments. Discuss grave obligations.
3. *"Now let's look at what the Catechism says about the Fifth Commandment and the common good of society starting with paragraph 2266."* Read P 2266 and pay attention to:  
"...not excluding, in cases of extreme gravity, the death penalty."  
Discuss the use of the phrases "not excluding" AND "extreme gravity". Point out that P 2267 will provide further criteria for when the death penalty should and should not be used. Continue reading P 2266 and point out the three effects of punishment listed at the end of the paragraph.  
"...to redress the disorder caused by the offense...preserving public order and the safety of persons...as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender."  
Discuss which effects of punishment the death penalty satisfies. Read P 2267 and pay attention to:  
"...they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person."  
Discuss why bloodless means better correspond to the common good and include grave obligations from P 2072. Discuss why bloodless means are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.
4. *"Next we will look at the papal encyclical, Evangelium Vitae written by Pope John Paul II in 1995."* Read P 56 paying close attention to:  
"The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice ever more in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God's plan for man and society."  
Discuss the relationship between human dignity and God's plan for man and society.

“...the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.”

Discuss how our penal system protects society from maximum security inmates

**Exercise:** Distribute the exercise to each student and have him/her complete it. Check the answers and have the student take home the exercise to discuss with his parents.

**Summary:** *“Today we used The Bible, The Catechism, and an Encyclical of Pope John Paul II to evaluate the Church’s teaching on the death penalty. Tomorrow we will take a closer look at how the death penalty has been and is currently being used in our state of Florida.”*

**Student Assessment:** Did the student name one of the two bible verses where the fifth commandment is found. Did the student name the three effects of punishment listed in CCC P#2266? Did the student name the two reasons in CCC P#2267 why bloodless means of punishment are better? Did the student state in which cases John Paul II declared it a necessity to use the death penalty?

## Death Penalty and Church Teaching Exercise

Name:

Date:

1. Name one of the two bible verses where the fifth commandment is found.
2. Name the three effects of punishment listed in CCC P#2266.
3. Name the two reasons in CCC P#2267 why bloodless means of punishment are better.
4. According to John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae*, when is it necessary to use the death penalty?

## Catholic Teachings On The Death Penalty: Part Two

Materials: Class sets of The Catechism and handouts from *Fact Sheet* from Death Penalty Info

Objectives: The student will use the *Fact Sheet* to write the answers to the five questions listed in the presentation.

Procedures:

**Review:** “Yesterday we used *The Bible, The Catechism, and an Encyclical of Pope John Paul II* to evaluate the Church’s teaching on the death penalty.”

**Overview:** “Today we will take a closer look at how the death penalty has been and is currently being used across our country and in our state of Florida.”

**Presentation:**

1. Have the following questions displayed on the board or chart paper around the room.
  - 1) **How many U.S. states have the death penalty?**
  - 2) **Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976 how many people have been released from death row nationwide for innocence? How many have been released from Florida**
  - 3) **Name the top five states that execute the most prisoners.**
  - 4) **Do states with the most executions have a lower murder rate?**
  - 5) **Which costs tax payers more money: the death penalty or life in prison without parole?**

Divide the students into groups and give each group a different color marker. Have each group write down their best guess to each question. Have the groups tape up the guesses under the question.

2. “Now we will look at a variety of figures and graphs on the death penalty to find the answers to these and other questions.” Display or pass out the four page fact sheet from Death Penalty Information Center.  
(Source: <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/FactSheet.pdf> )

3. Use the first two tables to discuss the answer to question 1.
4. Use the next graph *Number of Executions* to point out that in 1999 Pope John Paul II came to the United States and spoke critically of our death penalty. Executions in the United States have decreased since that event.
5. Look at the pie graph, *Race of Victim in Death Penalty Case* as well as the *Recent Studies on Race* at the top of page two. Discuss the statistics.
6. Use the next graph *Exonerations by State* to discuss the answer to question 2. Focus particularly on Florida having the most number of exonerations.
7. Use the table *Number of Executions by State* to discuss the answer to question 3. Use the exonerations and execution statistic to show that Florida has one exonerations for every three executions.
8. Use the graph *Murder Rates per 100,000-2008* to discuss the answer to question 4.
9. Use the statistics *Financial Facts About The Death Penalty* to discuss the answer to question 5. Focus particularly on the fact for Florida. Discuss what our government could do with that money every year.
10. “Turning back to the Catechism let’s read P 2258.”  
“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”  
Discuss the issue of uncertainty of innocence and executions.

**Exercise:** “Now you use your copy of the *Fact Sheet* to correctly answer the five questions I asked you at the beginning of class.” Pass out the exercise to each student and have him/her complete it. Check the answers and have the student take home the exercise to discuss with his parents.

**Summary:** *“Over the past two lessons we have reviewed much information on the death penalty. Most if not all of this information may have been new to you. Some of you may have changed your opinion on the death penalty, and some of you may have not. All of you are now aware of the realities of what our Church teaches and how our state implements the death penalty.”*

Student Assessment: Did the student use the *Fact Sheet* to write the answers to the five questions listed in the presentation?

## Death Penalty Facts Exercise

Name:

Date:

- 1) **How many U.S. states have the death penalty?**
  
- 2) **Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976 how many people have been released from death row nationwide for innocence? How many have been released from Florida?**
  
- 3) **Name the top five states that execute the most prisoners.**
  
- 4) **Do states with the most executions have a lower murder rate?**
  
- 5) **Which costs tax payers more money: the death penalty or life in prison without parole?**