

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA Fifth Commandment: You Shall Not Kill

“[Jesus said,] You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder.’ . . . But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.” (Matthew 5:21)

Insight

What effect does anger have on a person and on those around them?

Everywhere they went they had to be careful. Just walking down the halls could mean trouble. High school was supposed to be a place to learn. What they were learning about was small-town hatred and prejudice.

It seemed their only “crime” was wearing all black clothes, having different hairstyles, and displaying piercings in their ears and noses. The other students exhibited an unreasoning anger at this “strange” style and made it clear they didn’t like those who were different. Consequently, this made life miserable for the kids called “the Goths” as they were subjected to taunts, name-calling, and shunning. It sometimes even extended to physical violence.

The Goths, isolated by the others’ hate, learned to stick together. They learned to hit back in revenge when they could so that their tormentors would think twice about pitching them into lockers or lobbing ugly epitaphs their way. Verbal and physical violence only spawned more violence to the point where the school administration, teachers, and hall monitors were at their wits’ end about how to contain or control it.

For Reflection . . .

Deliberately hating one’s neighbor subverts the cultivation of charity and is therefore a grave sin.

What is the effect of hatred, both on the ones who hate and on those they hate?

In the above situation, what might be some antidotes to minimize or dissolve hatred?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2258–2330

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 389–402

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 466–486

Church Teaching

Human Life Is Sacred

The Fifth Commandment enshrines the Church teaching that human life is sacred. From its inception, one’s life involves a person in a creative relationship with God who is the ultimate end of that human life. No person can claim, under any circumstances, a right to directly destroy innocent life.

Sacred Scripture attests to the divine injunction against such murderous behavior (for example, Genesis 4:10–11, Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17, Genesis 9:5–6). Jesus himself reiterates the Old Testament Commandment against killing, and then he attaches to it warnings against anger, hatred, and vengeance (see Matthew 5:21–26, 38–48) since these attitudes frequently lead to violence and murder.

The Fifth Commandment

This Commandment forbids violence, hatred, terrorism, and murderous impulses at any level, whether that is between individuals or between groups of people or countries.

The Church upholds the legitimate, proportional physical defense of oneself (or one’s country) against an unjust aggressor. But this is seen as a last resort where no other recourse is possible.

Respect for others, avoiding conflict and violence, safeguarding peace, and promoting justice and right relationships by every means possible informs and grounds all our behavior. Respecting the dignity of others and promoting their lives extends to *all* persons, even those in the womb or those persons who are aged, ill, weak, and handicapped. Life and physical health are gifts from God that are to be nurtured and protected in others and in ourselves.