



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 17 October 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today I would like to continue the catechesis on the Fifth Word of the Decalogue, “*You shall not kill*”. We have already emphasized how this Commandment reveals that in God’s eyes human life is precious, sacred and inviolable. No one can have contempt for his own or another’s life; indeed, man bears God’s image within and is the object of His infinite love, in whatever condition he was called into existence.

In the Gospel passage we listened to a short time ago, Jesus reveals to us an even deeper meaning of this Commandment. He affirms that, before God’s tribunal, even ire against a brother or sister is a form of murder. This is why the Apostle John would write: “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 Jn 3:15). But Jesus does not stop at this, and in the same logic he adds that even insult and contempt can kill. And we are used to insulting, it is true. We tend to insult like exhaling. And Jesus tells us: ‘Stop, because an insult does harm; it kills’. Contempt. ‘But I detest these people, this person’. And this is a way of killing a person’s dignity. It would be nice if this teaching of Jesus were to enter the mind and heart, and each of us would say: ‘I will never insult anyone’. It would be a fine objective, because Jesus tells us: ‘Look, if you harbour contempt, if you insult, if you hate, this is murder’.

No human code equates such different acts, assigning them the same level of justice. And consistently, Jesus actually exhorts us to interrupt the offering of sacrifice in the temple if we remember that we have offended a brother, in order to go and find him and reconcile with him. Also, when we go to Mass, we should have this attitude of reconciliation with the people we have had differences with. Even if we have thought ill of them, we have insulted them. But many times, while we are waiting for the priest to come and say Mass, we gossip a little and speak ill of others.

But we cannot do this. Let us think about the gravity of an insult, of contempt, of hatred: Jesus equates them to killing.

What does Jesus mean by extending the field of the Fifth Word to this point? Man has a noble, very sensitive life, and has a hidden 'I' no less important than his physical being. Indeed, an inopportune phrase is enough to offend the innocence of a child. A cold gesture can suffice to wound a woman. To break a young person's heart, it suffices to rebuff his confidence. To annihilate a man, it suffices to ignore him. Indifference kills. It is like telling the other person: 'you are dead to me', because you have killed him in your heart. Not loving is the first step to killing; and *not killing* is the first step to loving.

At the beginning of the Bible, we read the terrible phrase that issues from the lips of the first murderer, Cain, after the Lord asks him where his brother is. Cain responds: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9).^[1] This is how assassins speak: 'it is not my concern', 'that is your business', and similar assertions. Let us try to answer this question: are we our brothers' keepers? Yes, we are! We are each other's keepers! And this is the path to life; it is the path of not killing.

Human life needs love. And what is authentic love? It is what Christ showed us, namely, mercy. The love we cannot forego is forgiveness, which accepts those who have wronged us. None of us can survive without mercy; we all need forgiveness. Therefore, if to kill means to destroy, terminate, eliminate someone, then *not to kill* would mean to care for, appreciate, include. And also forgive.

No one can delude him or herself: 'I am fine because I do nothing wrong'. A mineral or plant has this type of existence, however, man does not. A person — man or woman — does not. More is asked of a man or woman. There is good to be done, prepared for each of us, each his or her own, which makes us ourselves at the core. '*You shall not kill*' is an appeal to love and mercy; it is a call to live according to the Lord Jesus, who gave his life for us and rose for us. Once, here in the Square, we all repeated together a Saint's expression about this. Perhaps it will help us: 'It is good to do no wrong, but it is wrong to do no good'. We must always do good; go a step further.

The Lord, who by becoming flesh sanctified our existence; he, who with his blood made our life invaluable; he, "the Author of life" (Acts 3:15), thanks to whom each one is a gift of the Father. In him, in his love stronger than death, and by the power of the Spirit whom the Father gives us, we can accept the Word "*You shall not kill*" as the most important and essential appeal: that is, 'you shall not kill' signifies a call to love.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from England, Scotland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Indonesia, Canada and the United States of America. In this month dedicated to praying the Rosary, may Our Lady of the Rosary accompany you, and upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

I address a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we observe the liturgical memorial of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop and martyr in Rome. Let us learn from this holy bishop of ancient Syria to courageously bear witness to our faith. By his intercession, may the Lord give each of us the strength of perseverance in spite of adversities and persecution.

[1] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2259: "In the account of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. God declares the wickedness of this fratricide: 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand' (Gen 4:10-11)".