Dzhokhar’s Sentencing: The Death Penalty is Not Justice!

Fully aware of the abundance of violence in both our country and world, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) is committed to ensuring that violence is never authorized by our government and directed at any one individual, even if an individual himself committed acts of violence.

To this end, we denounce the decision to execute Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who was found guilty of murdering four innocent people and harming more than 250; such actions are evil. Nevertheless, we believe that the Gospel teaching affirming the dignity of all human life is without condition. Life itself is sacred, a gift from God. Nothing can undo the dignity infused into a human life.

The Catholic Church has increasingly spoken out for restorative justice and against the death penalty. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law he was taught as a young man. Justice is not about an eye for eye. Rather, justice is about identifying the harm done and creating processes for genuine accountability and healing. This is restorative justice.\(^1\) This is what human dignity calls for and challenges us to live.

Pope Francis describes the death penalty in the following terms:

“\(\text{It is an offence against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person, which contradicts God's plan for (hu)man and society, and his merciful justice, and impedes the penalty from fulfilling any just objective. It does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance.}^{”} \text{For the rule of law, the death penalty represents a failure, as it obliges the state to kill in the name of justice,}^{”}\text{ he said, adding, “Justice can never be wrought by killing a human being.”}^{2}\)

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have proclaimed:

"Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others….We oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human

\(^{1}\) CMSM Statement, Feb. 2014, \(\text{http://www.cmsm.org/justice-statements/RestorativeJustice_DzhokharTsarnaev_021914.pdf}\)

life… The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.”

Please join us in denouncing the decision of the US government to respond to the violence of Mr. Tsarnaev with its own violent execution. This is wrong.

Only with true restorative justice, then, can we interrupt the increasing networks and systems of violence, better prevent future violence, move towards healing, and initiate the process where forgiveness may arise.

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