

**Homily on the death penalty delivered by Deacon Carl Bunje at St. Thomas Aquinas Church on November 16, 2008**

**OF CONCERN TO ME**

Every day we make life decisions based on whether we have any interest in the question or subject matter.

If we feel that the subject matter is of no concern to us or is irrelevant we eliminate the question and do nothing. We have such a situation in today's Gospel. The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant was entrusted with one measly "talent" "to invest according to his ability. This third servant did not feel that the entrusting of one measly "talent" to invest was on any consequence. Since this situation was of no concern to this servant, he promptly dismissed the thought, moved on and did nothing.

In the Gospel of John, we are told of the story of Jesus being brought into the presence of Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate said: "Take him yourselves." Judge him by your own law. This man is of no concern to me. Take him! Take him! So they took Jesus, and he went out. And they crucified him.

We today are confronted with the question of the Death Penalty. Prisoners are presented to us for the Death Penalty. To be killed or not to be killed. Of what concern is this to us. I have not time to be bothered. The problem is too complex. I am not personally involved, why should I care? If the people want it this way ..... let it be.

**THE DEATH PENALTY IS OF NO CONCERN TO ME.**

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been personally involved in the killing of a person? Have you ever enabled a person to be executed?

**I HAVE!**

I have enabled a man to be executed. I have permitted a young man to be killed. I did participate in the death penalty. I did feel at the time, that it was of no concern to me. I could have saved the life of a young man but I did not. That death has haunted me since I was 22 years old, night and day for 65 years.

Now let me tell you a story:

The Second World War was in progress. I was a Navel Officer on leave, and by choice, I was spending my leave time in the very midst of the Battle of Manila seeking my mother. My mother had been stranded in Manila when Pearl Harbor was attacked. She was interned at the Japanese Internment Camp located on the former campus of Santo Tomas University.

When I got there, I was told she had left. Why, how, I did not know!. Miraculously, I met the Surgeon who had removed her cancerous breast and he gave me a map showing where she could be located.

After weeks and weeks of anxiousness, traveling in wartime from Washington, D.C., to Australia, to New Guinea, to Halmahera Islands, o Mindoror and finally to embattled Manila. Now, it would be a matter of minutes and I would have my mother safe in my arms. I said to myself, nothing can stop me now. I have her address. I have a map. If I walk quickly it will take only a few minutes and my quest will end. My heart was pounding as I headed to the front lines..... against the flood of distraught civilians come through the battle zone heading toward safety, friends and food.....

**Suddenly, I was stopped by two non military Filipino freedom fighters with a Japanese prisoner. Seeing me in uniform the guerillas presented me with their prisoner. As quickly as they had appeared, they disappeared even faster, leaving with a Japanese prisoner.**

**Remembering the protocol in war movies, I pulled my .45 out of its holster and pointed the gun at my prisoner. He was a mere boy, in his early teens! The Japanese army having depleted all their adults were now using up their youth. This is ridiculous I felt. Wait! Not so ridiculous!. My attention went from my prisoner to the .45 in my hand. Was it loaded? How can I tell, unless I lift the gun close to my eyes to check it. In correct military protocol this would not do the enemy might overwhelm you. Besides, I was a supply officer and had never had any interest in firearms.**

**Then reason came to my rescue. The bullets are kept in clip, and the clip is inserted into the handle of the pistol. So if the gun feels heavy, the clip must be in place. Thus the gun was loaded and ready to be fired.**

**As soon as I regained my confidence there came another problem. What do I do now with my boy prisoner? I was close to finding my mother, so very close to the end of my mission. And now, I have a prisoner on my hands. What do I do with him? His presence frustrated me. Three Filipino guerillas passing by must have noticed my frustration with the prisoner. They came up to me and asked me if they could relieve me of the young boy. I graciously gave the boy to them.**

**“If you want him, take him. He is of no concern to me. I have more important demands on my time!” Pontius Pilate was speaking again, and I agreed! I turned and was about to head out to my mother when I was jolted by three shots. BANG! BANG! BANG!**

**I swung around and saw the three guerillas walking out from behind a wall. They bowed towards me with thanks, smiled broadly, and walked away. A young boy had been killed. A prisoner had been executed. The death penalty had been observed.**

**I could have saved his boy’s live. He could have survived a period of internment, returned to Japan, had a family, lived to an old age. The Japanese boy’s innocent face and those three shots have haunted me these past years. He is of concern to me. His life was precious. All life is precious. I have no excuses.**

**My mother was also a participator in that same battle. She told me this story. In the same time-frame, she was confronted by a Japanese soldier and threatened with a blow from his sword. She was spared when he saw a bleeding Jesus on the crucifix in her arms. This soldier was running past my mother when the camouflage net over his head caught on the crown of thorns on the crucifix she was carrying. His helmet was pulled off his head and he became infuriated. He stared at the crucifix, slowly lowering his arm and sword, stood erect, came to attention, turned abruptly. A wooden carving interceded for my mother.**

**My mother, the young Japanese soldier, the person on death row, all of them await some INTERVENTION.... They need people like you and me to intercede. Otherwise, they will be killed.**

**ALL LIFE IS SACRED! WILL WE TOO..... SEE THE CROSS.... AND SPARE A LIFE.**