

**What Would Jesus Have to Say?  
Reflection on the Death Penalty October 12, 2006**

**October is Respect Life Month. In the words of Bishop McGrath from San Jose “Life is to be respected at all stages.”**

**Although I am fortunate that none of my loved ones has been murdered, I would like to share some of my experiences with those that have been touched by the death penalty. I have met family members that have lost a loved one to violence. Their pain is enormous. Some are very angry. But some have transformed their pain and have come to forgive the perpetrator.**

**But there are others that who are also suffering. I have met a mother whose son is on death row. Every other weekend she travels from Santa Monica to visit her son in San Quentin. She is devastated.**

**Then there are those who carry out executions. A few years ago I interviewed a Warden who was in charge of executing people. In his interview he said. Each night after an execution “I went home to my house in the middle of the night and climbed into the shower and scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed. But you can’t make your self feel clean”.**

**“I was troubled as I stood and watched these guys die in the gas chamber thinking: What are my children deep down thinking of their father? And ultimately what is my God going to ask of me when my time comes to be judged? “**

**So you see there is plenty of pain to go all around.**

**For me the crucial issue about the death penalty is what does Jesus have to say. We have a direct answer. When Jesus was confronted by the woman who was about to be stoned to death he said “Let you who is without sin cast the first stone”. Jesus was about love, compassion and forgiveness. There is no love and compassion about killing someone.**

**The message of forgiveness and reconciliation is a very difficult one to bridge. Yet in our culture of violence we have a recent sterling example that stands out. You will all be familiar with the killing of five Amish school girls in Lancaster County in Pennsylvania. The universal response of the Amish community was one of forgiveness. In fact they have set up a trust fund to take care of the family of the perpetrator of this crime.**

**The challenge of the Gospel is not an easy path to follow. This is the challenge we face regarding the death penalty.**

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