

Twenty -Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time

Exodus 20: 1 - 17 V. You shall not kill	Deuteronomy 5: 6 - 21 V. You shall not kill
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Last week began the most interesting topic of self-defense. Much of our understanding of this topic will depend on using proper definitions of some key terms: self, life, aggressor, and defense. Once again, here are the questions we asked last week: Did Jesus defend himself? Did he take his own life by allowing himself to be betrayed? How did Jesus escape the many other attempts on his life? What if self-defense includes taking the life of an aggressor? What are we defending when we speak of “self”? We saw that the Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Church in the Modern World clearly teaches about the need to take the life of another in cases of war when the war is justifiable. The Council even implied that refusal to defend your country can be a violation of human rights: “We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights...provided this renunciation can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself.” (See §78,¶5) Now we turn to our Catechism of the Catholic Church where we will find the same caution about violating the rights of self, as well as the rights of others. “The legitimate defense of persons and societies is not an exception to the prohibition against the murder that constitutes intentional killing.” (See CCC §2263) This statement makes the important distinction between ‘murder’ and ‘taking a life’. What is that distinction? The answer comes with a strange concept that we call “The Principle of Double Effect”. As the name implies, there are many consequences to any action we undertake. Some of the consequences we define as accomplishments or intended consequences. The other consequences can be described as unwanted side effects or unintended consequences. These side effects usually are known to us before the action is taken, yet they remain unintended consequences. For example, if you take a medication to cure a certain ailment then the instructions will warn against the types of unwanted side effects. These side effects can be serious, yet we may choose to take the medication with the intention of acquiring the wanted result and with the hope of avoiding the known and unintended side effects. The same concept will apply to self-defense.

