

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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Today we approach the topic of self-defense. 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”? These questions provoke many thoughts. We will start again with the 1965 Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This constitution has a rather substantial section devoted to the subject: The Avoidance of War. “Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and humanity. Such an act of war merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation.” (See §80, ¶4) This two sentence paragraph opens much discussion and need for interpretation. We want to investigate the meaning of unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation. Is condemnation simply a verbal voice of disapproval? The bishops write, “Government officials must at one and the same time guarantee the good of their own people and promote the universal good.” (See §82, ¶4) Again, we read, “Government authorities have the duty to protect the welfare of the people entrusted to their care.” This duty includes the need, “to undertake military action for the just defense of the people.” (See §79, ¶4) This just defense of peoples by their governments is continued with the teaching, “Those who devote themselves to the military service of their country should regard themselves as the agents of security and freedoms of peoples. As long as they fulfill this role properly, they are making a genuine contribution to the establishment of peace.” (See §79, ¶5) We can debate about many of these teachings. But certainly the Church recognizes the need for a military. This recognition must acknowledge that, at times, the force of a military unit will take the life of others. Listen to one more teaching: “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) This final provision will lead us into a rather intense look at the understanding of self-defense.