

When American forces killed Osama bin Laden, I thought they did the right thing. I was surprised at my reaction because I consider myself a pacifist, but apparently I'm not a very good one. I tried playing out the raid with a different ending: What if our troops had captured bin Laden alive? What then? Where do you keep him without putting his guards at peril? How do you try him in court without giving him a platform to spread his evil thoughts? I don't like violence; it only begets more. Ordinarily, we should use peaceful means to stop the cycle of violence. But bin Laden's case was not ordinary. Consider, for example, what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says about the death penalty: "Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. / If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person." Life without parole is better. Still, I couldn't see how non-lethal means could protect people's safety from this particular aggressor. It looks like we did the right thing.

After the killing, the spokesman for the Vatican, Father Federico Lombardi, said this: "Osama bin Laden, as we all know, bore the most serious responsibility for spreading divisions and hatred among populations, causing the deaths of innumerable people, and manipulating religions for this purpose. / In the face of a man's death, a Christian never rejoices, but reflects on the serious responsibilities of each person before God and before men, and hopes and works so that every event may be the occasion for the further growth of peace and not of hatred."

Sirach says as much in our first reading today: "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance. Forgive your neighbor's injustice." The psalm says, "The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion." God confronts our sins every day, yet is still willing to work with us. Pope Benedict XVI praised Americans this week for moving forward from the attacks, and he called upon us to build a world that promotes charity rather than violence. We can start this in our own homes and in our own city. Let me close with Pope Benedict's words. "It must be unequivocally stated that no circumstances can ever justify acts of terrorism. Every human life is precious in God's sight and no effort should be spared in the attempt to promote throughout the world a genuine respect for the inalienable rights and dignity of individuals and peoples everywhere. The American people are to be commended for the courage and generosity that they showed in the rescue operations and for their resilience in moving forward with hope and confidence. It is my fervent prayer that a firm commitment to justice and a global culture of solidarity will help rid the world of the grievances that so often give rise to acts of violence and will create the conditions for greater peace and prosperity, offering a brighter and more secure future. With these sentiments, I extend my most affectionate greetings to you. . . and I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and serenity in the Lord."