

MISSION INTENTIONS

SEPTEMBER 2022-2023

We pray that the death penalty, which attacks the dignity of the human person, will be ended in every country.

Country Focus: Venezuela

In 1863, Venezuela became the first country in the world to stop using the death penalty. Sadly, since then, Venezuela has at times struggled economically, and its government has been accused of human rights abuses. Our local church has been active in ministering to the people of Venezuela, and bearing witness of Christ's love.



Our archdiocese began a mission in the Diocese of Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela, in 1970. Many priests from our archdiocese have gone to serve the people in Ciudad Guayana. In addition to providing for people's spiritual needs, our priests also offer a weekly soup kitchen and care for the elderly.

Let us continue to pray for the people of Venezuela, that their human dignity may always be honored.

Leading to Knowledge of the Faith

"Even when people deny the dignity of others, we must still recognize that their dignity is a gift from God and is not something that is earned or lost through their behavior."

The quote above, from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document [A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death](#) (2005), reminds us that we are called to respect all life, even the lives of those who have done terrible things. We will learn more about the Church's teaching on the death penalty on the second page of this newsletter.

Saint Spotlight

Saint Dismas

Christian history remembers Saint Dismas as the "good thief." Of the two men crucified next to Christ, Saint Dismas understood that Jesus was the Messiah.

Very little is known about Saint Dismas, including his real name. The early Christian community began calling him "Dismas," which means "sunset" or "death" in Greek. By the fourth century, the name had stuck.

What we do know about Saint Dismas comes from the Gospel of Luke. We meet Saint Dismas as he is being crucified alongside Jesus and another thief. As the other thief begins to make fun of Jesus, telling him that if he is truly the Messiah, he should "Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39), Saint Dismas scolds him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed



have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40-41).

Saint Dismas goes on to ask Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom, to which Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43).

Many scholars point to Saint Dismas' willingness to confess his sins and his faith in Jesus as the Messiah as the reason Jesus promised him eternal salvation. Let us look to the example of Saint Dismas by being willing to always humbly admit our sins and proclaim Jesus as Savior.

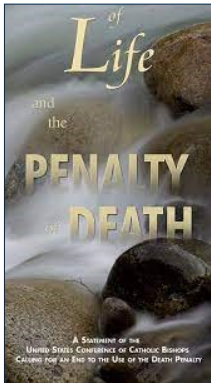
Saint Dismas is a patron saint of prisoners. We remember him each year on his feast day, March 25.

Formation for Life in Christ

We know from the Catholic social teaching principle of Life and Dignity of the Human Person that the Church opposes any attack on the sanctity of life, which includes the use of the death penalty. All lives are gifts from God and should be protected, even those who have done great harm.

While the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* used to state that governments had the right to use the death penalty to protect their societies as a last resort, when non-lethal means were not enough to provide safety for their citizens, in 2018, Pope Francis ordered it revised to read “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,” (CCC no. 2267).

Even before Pope Francis revised the Catechism, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops had



long argued against the use of the death penalty. They pointed to examples of God’s mercy, and God’s desire to be united eternally with all people. All punishment should not merely be an act of retribution, they said, but should lead to the restoration of the person being punished. Furthermore, no person should ever be denied the opportunity to accept God’s gift of eternal salvation.

As the revised Catechism states: “...more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption” (CCC no. 2267). Christ’s saving work on the cross was for all, and society should not deny anyone the chance to repent and return to God.

In this month’s video, we will learn more about Pope Francis’ decision to revise the Catechism to clearly oppose the death penalty. As you watch the video, pay attention to what Pope Francis says about the dignity of the human person. How does the death penalty violate the dignity given to every person by virtue of their being a child of God?

Celebrating the Mystery

All humans make mistakes. All of us sin and “fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But God, in his desire to be reconciled with all people, gave us the gift of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, so that when we do sin, we have a way to repair our relationship with God.

We do not deserve the gift of forgiveness, but God, in his infinite love, gives it to us anyway. When we accept this gift, we are called to offer the same mercy and forgiveness to others. One way we can do this is by joining the thousands of Catholics who are actively working to abolish the death penalty. For more information, visit <https://catholicismobilizing.org/>.

Teaching Prayer: The Act of Contrition

Part of receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation includes praying the Act of Contrition. In this prayer, we tell God we are sorry for our sins and that we will try not to sin anymore. We also ask God for support in turning away from our sins, because we know we cannot do it alone.

To pray the Act of Contrition:
[Click Here >>](#)

Pope Francis and the Death Penalty >>



- ✚ What can the Catholic community do to help end use of the death penalty?
- ✚ Why should the Church take an active stance against use of the death penalty?
- ✚ Why do you think Pope Francis decided to revise the Catechism to specifically state the Church opposes the death penalty?