

**THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT KILL****WHY MUST HUMAN LIFE BE RESPECTED ?**

Human life must be respected because it is *sacred*. From its beginning human life involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. It is not lawful for anyone directly to destroy an innocent human being. This is gravely contrary to the dignity of the person and the holiness of the Creator. “Do not slay the innocent and the righteous” (Exodus 23:7).

**WHY IS THE LEGITIMATE DEFENCE OF PERSONS AND OF SOCIETY NOT OPPOSED TO THIS NORM ?**

Because in choosing to legitimately defend oneself one is respecting the right to life (either one’s own right to life or that of another) and not choosing to kill. Indeed, for someone responsible for the life of another, legitimate defence can be not only a right but a grave duty, provided only that disproportionate force is not used.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT ?**

A punishment imposed by legitimate public authority has the aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offence, of defending public order and people’s safety, and contributing to the correction of the guilty party.

**WHAT KIND OF PUNISHMENT MAY BE IMPOSED ?**

The punishment imposed must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence. Given the possibilities which the State now has for effectively preventing crime by rendering one who has committed an offence incapable of doing harm, the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity “are very rare, if not practically non-existent”. (Evangelium Vitae). When non-lethal means are sufficient, authority should limit itself to such means because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good, are more in conformity with the dignity of the human person, and do not remove definitively from the guilty party the possibility of reforming himself.

## WHAT IS FORBIDDEN BY THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT ?

The fifth commandment forbids as gravely contrary to the moral law:

- *Direct and intentional murder* and cooperation in it;
- *Direct abortion*, willed as an end or as means, as well as cooperation in it. Attached to this sin is the penalty of excommunication because, from the moment of his or her conception, the human being must be absolutely respected and protected in his integrity;
- *Direct euthanasia* which consists in putting an end to the life of the handicapped, the sick, or those near death by an act or by the omission of a required action;
- *Suicide* and voluntary cooperation in it, insofar as it is a grave offence against the just love of God, of self, and of neighbour. One's responsibility may be aggravated by the scandal given; one who is psychologically disturbed or is experiencing grave fear may have diminished responsibility.

## WHAT MEDICAL PROCEDURES ARE PERMITTED WHEN DEATH IS CONSIDERED IMMINENT ?

When death is considered imminent the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. However, it is legitimate to use pain-killers which do not aim at in death and to refuse “over-zealous treatment”, that is the utilisation of disproportionate medical procedures without reasonable hope of a positive outcome.

## WHY MUST SOCIETY PROTECT EVERY EMBRYO ?

The inalienable right to life of every human individual from the first moment of conception is a constitutive element of civil society and its legislation. When the State does not place its power at the service of the rights of all and in particular of the more vulnerable, including unborn children, the very foundations of a State based on law are undermined.



*It is essential that every Catholic has access to good Catechesis to be able to deepen their faith. The Diocese of Plymouth recommends the many Catechetical Workshops from 'Franciscan at Home,' for more information on access to these and online or real group sessions contact [deborah.vankroonenburg@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:deborah.vankroonenburg@prcdtr.org.uk)*