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Prayer Vigil for Dennis Skillicorn
Comments on the Eve of the Execution

May 19, 2009

Richard Drummond was, perhaps, a martyr for charity, and certainly those who killed this Good Samaritan must appeal to God's mercy. What they did was an unprovoked and unjustifiable attack on human life. It seems that Dennis Skillicorn was part of this, and society ought to be protected from him and others who have shown themselves a serious threat to the common good.

Nonetheless, I strongly oppose Dennis Skillicorn's impending execution.

Society must have legitimate protection. This can and ought to be accomplished by means short of the death penalty.

The Catholic Church's position – in steadfast opposition to the death penalty – upholds the right and responsibility of legitimate authority to protect and defend its members. However, when the State is able to secure people's safety by non-lethal means, then the use of the death penalty cannot be morally justified. (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition, no. 2267)

I am grateful and consoled by what others observe as a change of heart – a conversion – in Dennis. He has – by all accounts – done some good in his time in prison. Rehabilitation is one of the important goals of our system. Dennis is a sign that this can happen.

Our prayers for clemency for Mr. Skillicorn are not strictly based on a claim of rehabilitation – but rather on something even more basic: the fundamental dignity and value of every human life, even those guilty of the most heinous crimes.

We have the means of protecting society without becoming killers ourselves. For the sake of our own integrity and dignity as stewards of society we ought to reject this method of ultimate retaliation.

There is another issue that troubles many of us today. It is the recent choice of our elected leaders to put aside not only a moratorium on Capital Punishment in Missouri, but even a formal and objective Study of the use of the death penalty in our State.

It is hard to fathom how – with clear indications and evidence that our system is flawed, and capable, in some instances, of putting to death the innocent – we will not act to better assure that it is just.

We gather in prayer and public witness tonight for several reasons and intentions:

We pray for peace and consolation for the family and loved ones of Mr. Drummond.

In the spirit of our various faith convictions and human good will, let us also pray for Mr. Skillicorn and those on death row, for their conversion and for their deliverance from this ultimate and irreversible punishment by death.

And let us pray for our country, state and community, that by peaceful and legal efforts, we will determine to protect the dignity and value of all human life, from inception until natural death, and that we will seek justice through non-lethal means.