

LIVING WITH CHRIST THIS WEEK

Sunday, February 14: Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C) - green
Monday 15: Ferial - green
Tuesday 16: Ferial - green
Wednesday 17: Ash Wednesday - purple
Thursday 18: Ferial - purple
Friday 19: Ferial - purple
Saturday 20 : Ferial - purple
Sunday 21: First Sunday in Lent (C) - violet

The Bible and Violence

2. The Bible's Response to Violence

We have read some of the incredible descriptions of violence in the Bible. But there are also passages that denounce violence and propose counteractive legal recourse.



THE LAW OF TALION [RETRALIATION]

The famous Talion Law existed long before Moses. It is one of the oldest recorded legal codes attributed to the Babylonian King Hammurabi, who died approximately 1750 years before Christ. The Bible presents three different versions of this code: in Ex 21:22-27, in Dt 19:16-21 and finally in Leviticus from which this text is taken: *Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return : fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury afflicted is the injury to be suffered* (Lv 24:19-20). The purpose of this Law was to eliminate any possible spiraling of personal violence and instead to propose a punishment equal to the crime committed, but no more than that. Leviticus adds this important element: *You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God* (Lv 24:22). This statement specifies two categories, foreigners and citizens, and that neither should be deprived of their rights. By imposing the same law for all, the Bible already offered an embryonic version of the *Charter of Rights*.

FORGIVING DEBT

Another series of laws aimed to stem violence and social disorder by imposing forgiveness of debts. Every seven years, according to Dt 15:1-11, or every 50 years (Jubilee Year) according to Lv 25:8-19, creditors must forgive the debts of their debtors. In this way, we would put the scales back to zero and avoid the situation where the elite would become wealthy at the expense of those who were weaker. We have tried, without success, to apply this law for certain third-world countries on the occasion of the new millennium in 2000.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE WORSHIP

Many prophets denounced those who practiced religion on a grandiose scale in their temples, while exploiting the weak and committing violent acts against those who were defenseless. Through the prophet Hosea, God unequivocally stated: *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings* (Ho 6:6). The prophet Amos dared to declare God's words in the temple of Samaria: *I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream* (Am 5:21-24).

These passages prepared us for Christ's coming, and in the Sermon on the Mount he affirmed: *You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well ... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteousness (Mt 5:38-39, 43-45).

Georges Madore , s.m.m.
Translated by Honore Kerwin Borrelli