

QUAMDIU, DOMINE? | “HOW LONG, O LORD?”: SENSELESS VIOLENCE IN OUR CITIES

When scrolling the local news online, if you have had the experience of seeing a **headline** about a **homicide** and proceed on to another story, that itself constitutes the best proof that our cities have serious problems. Yet, this is precisely what I did. I did not even click on the latest story about a homicide, so numb have I become at seeing **stories of violence** in the news. On February 10 in Saint Paul, we witnessed a 15-year-old boy **stabbed** to death at Harding High School. The alleged perpetrator was just 16. Less than a week later, a 48-year-old Stillwater **father** of three was murdered on the West Side. The victim, **Abdul Arif**, was an employee of a Tobacco shop on Stryker Avenue. As the psalmist states– “How long, LORD? Will you utterly forget me? How long will you hide your face from me? (Psalm 13:1-2) St. Paul Police investigators made lightening quick work leading to an arrest the following day of a 21-year-old man.

Almost nonchalantly, the article notes in the next paragraph that last year, the **same individual** was “charged with two other men in a drive-by shooting in which nearly four dozen gunshots were fired at two Maplewood apartment buildings.” Huh? Let’s see if I have this straight. The then 20-year-old and his two compatriots were charged with “firing guns through windows and walls” and “striking parked vehicles.” Over **40 shell casings** were found. To put it mildly, this was a drive-by ambush intended to intimidate. The trio then “led police on a high-speed chase in a stolen Dodge Charger from Maplewood to St. Anthony, where they crashed into a utility pole and ran.” It beggars the imagination how a man charged just eight months ago was **roaming the streets**. Out on bond, the altercation at the tobacco store occurred immediately following his court hearing!

To add insult to injury, one of the other two involved in the drive-by shooting (again, still pending!) was charged with shooting up the **Minneapolis 4th Precinct** with a machine gun in July 2022. Under a plea deal, **two felony charges** of possessing a machine gun and **reckless discharge** of a weapon were dismissed. Instead, that young man pled guilty to one felony count of **riot**. His 12-month sentence was stayed. Translation? **Zero** prison time. Fewer than 90 days later, he was charged in a new case. There were **17,355** felony convictions in MN in 2019. Only 5,965 were recommended for prison. And of those, 2,353 received a mitigated (downward) departure (no prison or less time than recommended). Thus, of 17,355 felony convictions, only 3,612 were fully sentenced. It’s not my intention to unfairly single out any individual, but rather attempt to gain some **perspective** on the uptick in crime that we have seen. Why is it?

It is noteworthy that many large cities have **reclassified** (i.e., downgraded) certain crimes to the level of a gross misdemeanor. Frankly, this helps with the statistical analysis; it is effectively “moving the goalposts” of justice, such that the realities do not appear as grave. Under Proposition 47– San Francisco’s **voter-approved** ballot initiative– stealing goods worth less than **\$950** does not count as felony, but a **misdemeanor**. Even if caught, the San Francisco police were left only to be able to give them a citation for court. How many even bothered to show up? I cannot even shop at Walgreen’s for personal toiletry items without pushing the button and having a store clerk come to the aisle to unlock the **plexiglass door**, proceeding to inquire as to which **brand** of an item I wanted. It is infuriating.

The 18th century French diplomat and philosopher **Joseph de Maistre** observed, “Every nation gets the government it deserves.” People who complain about our criminal justice system as it currently stands should honestly review the policies of those for whom they voted. Are those leaders doing what they said they would do, or have they **dropped the ball**? Informed citizens should **demand accountability**. The last security-related incident here took place on a quiet weekday in a nearly empty church. Our Police are understaffed and overworked. I support them 100%. But when they finally arrived (after several calls), they no trespassed and placed the individual in the back of a squad car. Later on, that **same day** he entered another parish Church, but this one was filled with school children. Brave teachers surrounded him, and the police were summoned again. *Quamdiu, Domine*. How long, O Lord?

Something must change. Let me be clear. There ought to be **civil policy debates** about the criminal justice system and its **historic inequities** towards minorities. Criminal justice reform has a place in civic discourse. As just one example, for those who have committed certain felonies, served their time and have exhibited rehabilitation, the restoration of **voting rights** is worthy of due consideration. However, the current specter of people being run through the system, plea bargains and “catch and release” policies have led to the real and absolute loss of innocent life. What would I say to the tobacco store owner’s family? How would I comfort them? This senseless violence takes its toll on every community. We need to do better, much better.

- News of the tragic **death** of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O’Connell left Catholics in the City of Angels **reeling**. He was **murdered** in his home last Saturday afternoon. Archbishop Jose Gomez noted: “Every day he worked to show compassion to the poor, to the homeless, to the immigrant, and to all those living on society’s margins. He was a good priest and a good bishop, and a man of peace.” The Irish-born bishop mostly served in Hispanic parishes before he was named auxiliary bishop in 2015.
- I urge your **participation** in the “United for Life” Advocacy Day (10:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m.) this **Tuesday, February 28** at the State Capitol. The day begins with a rally in the Rotunda, followed by meetings with state representatives and includes several educational speakers. Registration is required. To sign up, [click the link](#) online or visit the **Minnesota Catholic Conference** website.
- Today we take up our **final Heat Collection** of the winter. And what a winter it has been! Your generosity is as needed as it is appreciated. Envelopes may be found in the pews.
- “**March Madness**” draws near. I’ve ordered a copy of **Sr. Jean Dolores-Schmidt’s** new memoir entitled “Wake Up with Purpose: What I’ve Learned in My First Hundred Years” for my mother. We all can learn something from our **elders!** The **103-year-old** BVM sister came to national attention as chaplain for Loyola University (Chicago) men’s basketball team that advanced to the Final Four in 2018.
- It’s not too late to make your Lenten resolutions. Consider **attending weekday Mass** (at least 2-3 times per week) and/or Stations of the Cross. **Don’t delay!** See the sidebar for Lenten regulations.
- Better late than never! If you were **snowed out** of Ash Wednesday, not to worry. We will offer **blessed ashes** after the weekend Masses for those who wish to receive them.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector