

Second Sunday of Lent
March 13, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph
Catholic “Just War” Part Two

“Yet the question of warfare is a moral question and the immensity of the problems inherent in modern warfare does not excuse us from exercising moral criteria in evaluating those problems. We cannot leave judgment about such matters to soldiers and leaders alone, because the human dignity at issue is ours. We all share responsibility for how our human dignity is treated. To refuse to think in moral categories about war is to surrender ahead of time to barbarism and injustice.” (Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, Twelve Tough Issues, p. 52)

The Catholic Church’s “Just War Doctrine”, as we began our reflection last weekend, professes that the state has the right to declare and wage war. This right acknowledges that the state has the duty to protect the rights of its citizens when those rights are threatened by an unjust aggressor. We understand that this declaration is one of a very serious nature and is generally made as a last resort. To help those leaders and governments who must make this haunting decision, the Catholic Church, through the two great theologians – Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas, developed and expanded upon a doctrine which would inevitably seek to define what criteria should be present to declare war and what criteria would be necessary to guide armies during a war. We will, briefly, look at these two components: *ius ad bellum* (Latin for right to war) and *ius in bello* (right in war).

Before one can declare a war, which could be just, seven components must be fulfilled. These are: (1) Just Cause - the cause must be morally just. For example, we fight to assist/defend/rescue a person or group and we fight to repel invaders. (2) Competent Authority - only legitimate or authorized leaders have the moral authority to send a nation into war. No one person, group, or entity has the authentic authority to declare war who is not the leader of said nation. (3) Comparative Justice - the reasons a state would declare war must mean those values/rights are in such jeopardy that they would outweigh the potential loss of life and property which would naturally follow. (4) Right Intention - the reasons for declaring war must be just. One may fight to restore peace and not for revenge or total destruction. (5) Last Resort - all viable alternatives to war must be exhausted before one resorts to war. (6) Probability of Success - for a war to be just, we must have a reasonable hope to be victorious. Sacrificing soldiers and citizens merely to prove a point is not acceptable. (7) Proportionality - all suffering and loss which result from a war must be proportionally less than would have occurred if a war had never been declared.

During a war, two components are necessary for one’s behavior to assist in the war remaining just. (1) Proportionality - unlike the definition of proportionality before a war, during the fighting, one has to deem the means being used (weapons) will not inflict greater damage and suffering than necessary to end the conflict. (2) Discrimination of noncombatants -

it would be immoral to target residential areas (nonmilitary and strategic) for the purpose of inflicting collateral damage or instilling fear and terror into civilian populations.

Allow me to conclude by first thanking you for taking the time to listen over these two weeks. I realize that some may find this topic lacking or thinking it may apply to someone else to decide. I understand this, however, in answering my question from last week, we need to know these things. We need to learn them and teach them to younger generations. Yes, we may be the most technologically advanced society at this moment, but other moments and advancements will arrive in the future. Does the Catholic Church's Just War Doctrine still apply? I respond - Yes, Yes and again Yes. It is quite a sobering thought that a later generation, not guided by the principles, could declare and wage a war filled with an extreme amount of destruction, suffering, and carnage. May God never let a generation like this, one so devoid of empathy towards one's fellow man, ever arise - for God help us if one does.