

## Reflection

### Believing as We Do

On the evening of August 15, 2019, Stephen Michael West sobbed as he spoke his final words: “In the beginning, God created man. And Jesus wept. That’s all.” Having spoken thus, Stephen Michael West was executed in an electric chair. On the Solemnity of Our Blessed Mother’s Assumption into Heaven.

*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.* Pray for us sinners whose prayers to “protect life from conception to natural death” are too often followed by advocacy solely for the unborn. While unborn children *must* be defended and protected, Stephen Michael West was also a beloved child of God.

I entered Stephen’s full name and date of death in my personal book of remembrance, right there among my own loved ones who had died, among the loved ones of friends and family. Eight of them in August 2019, me wrapped up with all of them in the loving arms of God, a microcosm of the infinite communion of saints.

“How *dare* she?” some may think. To lift up a Herod. To sully the feast of the Holy Innocents with the memory of Stephen Michael West, an unholy and guilty criminal.

How dare I *not*? Believing as I do that we are all created in the image of God. And that all life is holy. And that “thou shalt not kill” means just that.

In this Octave of Christmas, we look from the creche to the cross, and we dare to believe that forgiveness lies therein and thereon. And so do judgment and mercy and redemption. If we truly believe this, how dare we take the life and death of another into our own hands?

As if the year 2020 did not bring enough suffering and death, in the United States we had an additional gut punch: the sickening and sinful resumption of federal executions. On this feast of the Holy Innocents, if we have not already done so, we should turn to our Catechisms and insert Our Holy Father Pope Francis’s May 2018 revision to Article 5, “The Fifth Commandment”:

The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, “that the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,” and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide. (2267)

Until such time as that abolition happens, the world should hear the sound of our weeping and lamentation. That’s all.

Mary Stommes

*Mary Stommes is an oblate of St. Benedict and editor of Give Us This Day.*