

**Letting Go of Retaliation**    The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day)    Wednesday, November 2, 2016    8:15 AM    Wis 3:1-9;    **Rom 5:5-11;**  
Jn 6:37-40    (God takes upon himself all injuries.)

**“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”**

This is one of the more profound thoughts that St. Paul had, and it's something that most people don't think about too much, how Christ came and died for sinners. At the Last Supper Jesus took the cup of wine and said, **“This is my blood which will be poured out for you”**—saying that to his apostles, basically good people, following Christ, doing good works but, nonetheless, Jesus said his blood would be poured out for them, **as well as for many.**

This idea of Jesus' blood—it's very hard for modern people to think about it. But if you go back to the old covenant, that is **the covenant with Moses**, the whole idea is that **human beings** must give up, and this is rarely referred to, but they **must give up the right of retaliation.** That's what covenant was about. **If you are going to live in the covenant with God, you cannot retaliate against your enemies.** It was not said at that time you must love them; you just may not retaliate. You must not retaliate. **“Vengeance is mine, says the Lord”**—“vengeance is mine.” The Lord is about setting things straight. And the only way people could be motivated to surrender their right of retaliation is to have a legal system that would do it for them that they could trust. And it was **a legal system that took away the subjective element in the feeling of being injured or harmed. It stipulated exactly what the major injuries were.** “You shall not kill. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness,” and so on. Those are the major injuries that the Lord would avenge. Minor injuries were avenged through what we call civil law, law suits with appropriate penalties, usually monetary. But the idea is no private retaliation, **no private vengeance, not for you, not for your family.** And in this way we see that modern Islam is not in any way connected to this idea of covenant, nor is any other religion I know of. **It's exclusively Israel and Christianity that have this idea that the members must surrender to God the right to avenge themselves.** However, this still leaves a whole swath of people who have to be avenged, who have violated the stipulations of the covenant, who must be executed. That's the basic idea, and that was **the responsibility of the community to try and to execute the law of God.**

Now what Paul is saying is that Jesus came, the Word of God, in fact Yahweh incarnate. **Jesus is the Lord who has this right and obligation to avenge.** And he avenges all wrongs and all injuries with his own blood. He accepts retaliation against himself instead of against anybody else. That's what this means: "in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." So now in Christ, in Jesus, God shows his true nature. **His desire for justice is so infinite that he is willing to pay the price himself, out of nothing but love for sinners, for those who have done the injury.** That's the key that Paul has got to in this particular lesson. And it's something we need to think about, how **God takes upon himself all injuries.**

But that **leaves us with a great obligation to deal with all of our feelings of being insured, hurt, betrayed, let down. These feelings will drag us downward and lock us into a very negative, shadowy life.** And God doesn't want that. God wants us to live and to thrive, and **to live and to thrive we have to live a life of reconciliation, forgiveness, freedom from all feelings of injury and betrayal and being offended and being cheated** and so on. We have to let go of all of that to live in the light of God. And we can because **God became human and provided a remedy for all injuries with his own life.** He gave his life for all other lives, who in justice should die. And this has **paved the way now for the forgiveness of all sins,** all except sin against the Holy Spirit, which is the very denial of forgiveness.

**So we are still free. We can either follow Christ and live in freedom** and live in peace, forgiving our enemies, forgiving those who have let us down, forgiving those who betrayed us, because God has come in to make up for everything, and God is willing to and in fact desirous of being for us all that we need, loving us toughly and totally and caring for our every need. And we can respond to that with acceptance, **or we can deny it,** in which case we are not living a life of faith.