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2014

Let Live

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Let Live" (2014). *Spiritual Essays*. 352.

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Let Live

Many of us learned in school about Roman gladiators, and how the crowd would give a "thumbs up" sign if they wanted to let a defeated gladiator live rather than be killed. Of course the crowd could give the opposite sign, indicating their will that one gladiator kill the other now defenseless warrior. Humans determine about others whether to let live or not. God, who creates all human life, has made only one determination: to let live, no matter how each person speaks, thinks or behaves.

I cannot bring into my mind an image of the One who originates all life deciding to kill any one of us, even the person we might judge as the most evil in the world. Nor am I able to think of God taking the role of either an emperor or a member of a crowd, and giving a sign about one person's treatment of another that would indicate anything other than "let live."

All of us are fully aware that throughout human history, it has been and is now almost unthinkable for an organized society to consider trying to imitate God's attitude of "let live" with regard to everyone. The manifold exceptions to such a stance of "let live" include, for example, individual criminals who are placed on death row according to reasons of justice; or using deadly force against foreign hostile individuals or military personnel as deemed necessary for national security; or eliminating persons who are deemed possible threats as justified by self-defense; or, in some cases, disposing of some who are sources of discomfort because they are not like us or they disagree with us. A variety of understandable reasons are offered to explain these and many individual cases which cannot easily be reconciled with God's radical decision to "let live."

None of us are in a position to resolve the disparity between the common practices of civil society and God's stance with regard to human life. But we can reflect upon the decisions we make each day that are not literally about life or death, but do express our attitudes and values. We can always grow more adept at exercising hope and becoming more conscious of the movements in our hearts that complement and sometimes transcend common-sense reasoning. It is certainly not required of any one of us to bring the world community to accept a uniform policy of any kind. But each of us is completely responsible for our own attitudes.

One of the most gracious aspects of how we influence one another is the manner in which our good attitudes flow naturally into appropriate behavior without our consciously thinking about it when we speak or act. Much of what we say and do in our day-to-day lives arises from our ordinary encounters with God through the common means of our reading and

hearing, reflecting and praying. Our attitudes imperceptibly align with the Spirit of God who is always present within us and in all of creation about us. We are not yet fully formed, no matter what our age or circumstances, even as regards our commitment to the value of human life.

Rather than only using our powers of reasoning, we can, to great effect, quietly consider God looking at each and all of us on earth with the gracious ongoing commitment to "let live," which none of us can rightly claim as being wholly deserved. Our participation in such experiences is always good for us, and for all.

Let live.