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On the Death of the Wicked (Fr. Lawrence R. Farley)

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The news, on this Sunday evening May 1, is full of the death of Osama bin Laden at the hands of American troops in Pakistan. I listened to both President Obama's announcement of the death, and Prime Minister Harper's statement regarding it. Both Obama and Harper's words were measured and sound, and I find nothing to

take issue with in either of them. Osama bin Laden was, by any standards of civilized society, a murderer, someone who plotted to kill innocent men, women and children in support of his personal ideology, which seems to have been motivated by hatred for the West and the U.S.A. in particular. He rejoiced in those deaths, showed no apparent remorse for them, and was intent on planning and carrying out more such acts of terrorism. His death, either by execution following a judicial trial, or by assassination by American troops, was just.

Nonetheless, I find I can do little rejoicing, and cannot share the jubilation expressed by those waving American flags as they surged about the White House. I understand their feeling, I think, which is in part born from the deep sense of shame and anger following the attacks of 9-11. But I cannot bring myself to rejoice. I am happy that his death means that bin Laden himself will carry out no further acts of terrorism (though others will doubtless step up to fill that gap), and I am happy to the extent that his death deprives his organization of a charismatic and therefore effective leader. But as a Christian, I still mourn the loss of a soul.



As disciples of Jesus, we are called to do the hard work of praying for our enemies, and hoping (even against hope) for their repentance. Bin Laden's death cuts off the possibility of his earthly repentance, and bodes ill for the eternal fate of his soul. Brethren, this is a loss. Whatever righteous indignation we feel regarding him and his horrendous acts, the fact remains that God loved him, even as He loves everyone He has made, in spite of their sins. God does not only love the righteous, but also sinners, which is why Christ died on the cross. He loved Judas

Iscaiot. He loved Hitler, Stalin, and Jack the Ripper. He loves Paul Bernardo. The chance (make that “long shot”) for Paul Bernardo to repent still remains. The chance for Judas, Hitler, Stalin, and Jack the Ripper to repent has come and gone. So now the chance for Osama bin Laden.

It is hard to come to terms with this bit of theology, especially if we have been personally touched by the evil that evil men do. But God’s love for all remains a fact, even if that love will never be returned and the soul saved. It is as God said through the Prophet Ezekiel—words alluded to every time a priest prays for the penitent in the rite of sacramental confession: “As I live, declares the Lord God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11) Somewhere in his life, each soul that is finally lost turns away from God and the light, and keeps on turning away. That is why they are lost. We can rejoice that Hitler was defeated, that Stalin is no more, that Jack the Ripper’s horrifying career came to an end. But we cannot rejoice in their damnation. Somewhere in our own rejoicing in justice, room must be found for sorrow at the loss of a soul that God made, died for, and loved.

By Fr. Lawrence Farley

This article was originally posted on May 2, 2011 on [Straight from the Heart](#). Many more of Fr. Farley’s articles and thoughts can be found on his blog, [Straight from the Heart](#). This article was posted here with permission.