

THOU SHALT NOT TORTURE

What a strange era ours is, that finds itself with the responsibility of drafting a new commandment that God didn't even imagine, when He gave to Moses the sacred tablets! Thou shalt not torture: it is that today we torture and greatly: it is, that we need to wake up our consciences...little tortured by the reality of torture.

Torture is spreading throughout the world. In certain countries, it is institutionalized; it becomes even a way to govern, camouflaged beneath psychiatric treatments or slogans of national security. We invent refined systems to properly torture, without leaving a trace. We export sophisticated torture equipment as much as we do household appliances. With this rationalizing of torture, the Inquisition, says Pierre Emmanuel, was nothing but a fairytale.

Our mind, is thus getting used to seeing the most monstrous things. At first we refuse to believe it, then we react swiftly or slowly. And soon, we slide down a slippery slope, made of all our neglects, of all in which we are complicit. The slightest sign by which we despise our fellow people can, from scorn to contempt, make us heartless and even gratified executioners

What a strange era ours is, that we can boast of seeing torture forbidden by the constitutions and universal declarations and are amazed to learn that torture spreads with the most subtle pseudo-justifications! Pope Paul VI has spoken of it as a dangerous "epidemic." "Torture," he says, "is to be absolutely condemned, it is never permissible, not even under the pretext of exercising justice and defending the public order..." We must further radicalize the fight against torture, not accepting half measures, make a principle of denouncing torture whatever the motive or the place may be.

A magnificent mission calls Christians to the forefront of the struggle for the abolition of torture with the same momentum as other generations fought slavery. Let us beware, this evil is like the second-headed Hydra. It resurfaces quickly, everywhere and in ourselves.

Courage and perseverance.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray