

TAKE AWAY THE NOISE 12 November 2017, Cathedral

**Q: How long is the waiting period to buy a Handgun, Shotgun or Rifle in Texas?**

A: There is no waiting period for purchasing a firearm in the state of Texas.

**Q: I just moved to Texas, do I have to register my firearms?**

A: No, there is no state registration of firearms.

**Q: Can I carry a firearm on my person?**

A: Yes, with proper licensing... you may carry a pistol or revolver on your person so long as it remains concealed. Long guns ... do not have to be concealed, but must be carried in a manner not calculated to cause alarm, and do not require a license.

**Q: Can I carry a firearm in my vehicle?**

A: Yes. With the passage of the Motorist Protection Act you may now readily carry handguns, loaded and within reach, so long as you conceal the firearm. Long guns do not have to be concealed and may be loaded and within reach.

**Q: Are “assault weapons” banned in Texas?**

A: No. Texas abides by Federal law which at this time has no restrictions on so-called “assault weapons” such as semi-auto(matics).

**Q: Is there a limit on the number of rounds a magazine may hold?**

A: No. The only limit on magazines in Texas is the number of rounds you are physically able to cram into the thing...

Just a week ago Christians at worship in Texas were gunned down. Almost every person was either killed or injured. Amongst the dead were an 18 month-old and a pregnant woman. It was the worst mass shooting in a place of worship in American history.

Why talk about it today? Because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ and their grief in that small town of 700 people must be anguish. Because it is only a month or so after the deadly rampage in Las Vegas. Because it could be us, it could even be in our Cathedral.

I don't blame you if you are quietly thinking *Well that's not very nice to have to think about on a baptism day.* But it does point us to some aspects of our service of baptism that we tend to soft-pedal. The symbolism of baptism is participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We

like the resurrection part, but we might be a bit squeamish on the death part. If you were to attend a baby's baptism in an Orthodox church, say, you would witness the priest plunge the baby bodily under the water in a metaphor of death, and in that little Texas town you can be sure that all the adults, at least, would also have been baptised by total immersion.

In this symbol of death we are casting off our natural self-centredness and being raised to a new life of serving Christ by serving others.

Another squirmy bit in the service might be the question *Do you renounce all evil influences and powers that rebel against God?* It sounds kinda medieval, but we need to be able to name evil as evil so that it doesn't take us by surprise, unprepared for its subtlety.

One man who teaches about Church security in the US commented: *“The quantity and the frequency of these shootings is continually going up, ...the church is no longer sacred ground. I wish that most of us who are teaching about church readiness for this type of crime were wrong, but it’s not wrong. Evil has invaded sanctuary and will continue to do so.”*

The stealth of evil is to train people to accept that *guns don't kill people, people kill people*. The stealth of evil is convincing people that less gun control means more security, when in the USA you are 40 times more likely to be killed by a gun than in the UK, for example. The stealth of evil is Donald Trump saying “We have a lot of trouble with mental illness in this country” when one of the first things he actually did in office was to make it easier for people with a diagnosed mental illness to buy a weapon. Why would he do that? To get more money and influence from the NRA.

What are the powers? Walter Wink tells us that they are systems at work in the world, often covertly, which when evil entrap people.

But there are also positive systems which are life-giving and which enhance our humanity.

So, for example in 2001 one person attempts to blow up a plane with a shoe bomb. Since then, international air travellers have to take off their shoes for scanning before being allowed to board. That is a positive, life-giving systemic change.

Since 1968 one and a half million people have died from gun violence in America. But that problem apparently can't be solved except with thoughts and prayers. As Christians we must name it as a systemic evil, even though it is not our country, because the bleed from these violent events has no international boundaries. To people of evil intent, each gun crime has a permission-giving quality to it. A similar example is the culture of sexual abuse that has been an under-the-radar norm in Hollywood.

Thoughts and prayers instead of justice for the victims and intelligent law is an abuse of prayer. It is simply distracting noise, weasel words. The prophet Amos, speaking for God, said *Take away from me the noise of your songs – I will not listen to the melodies of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and integrity like an everflowing stream.*

Even consoling words can be evil when they are noise that diverts attention from justice. A just society is one that is life-enhancing for all its citizens. As Gabe Ortiz wrote recently *If you call yourself “pro-life” but do nothing to stop gun violence, you are not really pro-life.*

It would be nice if baptism was a magical talisman to protect our children from all harm. God, in loving us has given us genuine free will, which includes the freedom to do evil.

We resist evil powers by refusing to let hate speech and gun violence become merely white noise in the background of our lives. In this Peace Month we practice peace. And we can pray like this, for our selves, and for our children:

*Lead me from death to life,  
from falsehood to truth;  
lead me from despair to hope,  
from fear to trust;  
lead me from hate to love.  
Let peace fill our heart,  
our world, our universe.*

- Ian Render

