

Tridentine Community News

April 26, 2026 – Third Sunday After Easter

The Just War Doctrine Part 1 of 2

By James Murphy

The Just War Doctrine in traditional Catholic teaching is a moral framework developed to determine when the use of armed force can be morally legitimate. Far from encouraging violence, it exists to limit it, placing strict conditions on when war may be entered (*jus ad bellum*) and how it must be conducted (*jus in bello*). Rooted in Scripture, natural law, and refined by theologians like St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas, the doctrine remains a cornerstone of traditional Catholic moral teaching.

Foundations of the Doctrine

Catholic teaching begins with the principle that peace is the natural state intended by God. War is always a tragic consequence of sin and disorder. However, because evil exists, the use of force may be necessary to protect the innocent and restore justice.

1. *Jus ad Bellum* (Right to Go to War)

According to the *Summa Theologica* and later magisterial teaching, several strict conditions must be met:

- **Just Cause:** War must confront a real and certain danger (e.g., defense against aggression).
- **Legitimate Authority:** Only duly constituted public authorities may declare war.
- **Right Intention:** The aim must be peace and justice, not revenge, conquest, or hatred.
- **Probability of Success:** It must be reasonably possible to achieve the intended goals.
- **Last Resort:** All peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted.
- **Proportionality:** The anticipated good must outweigh the harm caused by war.

2. *Jus in Bello* (Right Conduct in War)

Even when a war is justified, moral law governs how it is fought:

- **Discrimination:** Non-combatants (civilians, clergy, children) must not be intentionally targeted.

- **Proportionality:** The force used must be proportionate to the objective.
- **No Evil Means:** Intrinsically evil acts (e.g., genocide, torture) are never permitted.

Historical Examples of Justified Use

While no war is perfectly just in every aspect, some conflicts are commonly cited as meeting many of the criteria of just war doctrine.

1. Defense Against Invasion – World War II

The Allied response to aggression by Nazi Germany is often viewed as a clear example of a just cause. After events like the Invasion of Poland, nations had a moral duty to defend innocent populations from tyranny and mass atrocities.

The systematic murder of millions during the Holocaust further reinforced the necessity of armed intervention. The war, though devastating, was waged to stop grave injustice and restore peace.

2. Repelling Immediate Threat – The Battle of Lepanto (1571)

The naval conflict known as the Battle of Lepanto is often cited in Catholic tradition as a defensive war. A coalition of Christian states resisted expansion by the Ottoman Empire, which posed a direct threat to Europe.

The victory was seen not only as military success but as a defence of Christendom and a protection of populations from conquest. This triumph was attributed to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the Holy Rosary. A feast of commemoration was instituted on October 7th under the title Our Lady of Victory, later renamed to Our Lady of the Rosary.

3. Protection of Innocents – Defensive Conflicts

Throughout history, local rulers defending their people from unjust aggression have been seen as acting within just war principles. For example, resistance movements against unjust occupation can be morally justified when they meet the criteria of legitimate authority and right intention.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 04/28 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (St. Paul of the Cross, Confessor)

