



**The Catholic Diocese
of Jackson**

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Bishop of Jackson



**The Catholic Diocese
of Biloxi**

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December 13, 2022

In anticipation of the execution of Thomas Loden tomorrow, our thoughts and prayers go out to the Gray and Farris families as they continue to grieve and heal from his horrific act of violence. Their unspeakable suffering remains a heavy cross in their lives.

We share in their suffering. In 2016, two Catholic Nuns were murdered in Holmes County, Mississippi. Sister Paula Merrill, and Sister Margaret Held, served at a local medical clinic. Their brutal murders in the small community of Durant, Mississippi caused shock and sadness.

Even in the midst of such profound loss, the Sisters' religious communities, their families, and the local church stated their opposition to the death penalty. This response is deeply rooted in our Christian faith and Catholic tradition.

The death penalty is not a deterrence to murder. We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill others. Likewise, the antidote to violence is not more violence.

The execution of Thomas Loden is the second in just over a year in Mississippi. We respectfully submit the perspective and teachings from our Catholic faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that promote the abolition of the death penalty.

We encourage and pray for a more comprehensive debate that calls into question our assumptions used to morally legitimize the death penalty in Mississippi and in our nation.

We recognize that the State must protect innocent people from violent criminals. Our State and country have the ability to provide justice and protect the innocent without using the death penalty. At this time in our nation when violence afflicts the web of life, we do not need state sanctioned violence to add to this vicious cycle.

We implore our fellow citizens to ask our elected officials to end the violence of the death penalty and to replace it with non-lethal means of punishment. We are called to respect every human life because each of us is created in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:27)

As Christian leaders we call for alternatives to capital punishment more in keeping with our Christian values, the common good, and the dignity of the human person.

Yours in Christ,

Joseph R. Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson

Sincerely yours in Christ

Louis F. Kihneman, III
Bishop of Biloxi