

## **A message from Fr. Classen about the ethics of hunting:**

I'm well aware that some will be upset, and perhaps scandalized, by the notion of a priest who not only actively hunts and fishes, but who also passionately promotes it. I do get rather amusing hate-mail from time to time in which the usually anonymous author emphatically asks, "How can you, a man of God, kill his creatures?" My response is, ultimately, one word: food. While many Americans do their "hunting" at the grocery store, we in the outdoors community do it in the woods and on the waters.

Many misguided, uneducated folks believe that hunters and fishermen exist only to rape the land of its resources and kill animals for the "sport" of it. Personally, I don't consider hunting or fishing a "sport" at all. I, like millions of others, venture into the outdoors to spend time with God, family and friends, while being surrounded by the beauty of our Lord's creation — and, yes, at times I respectfully harvest food from that creation to sustain my life and feed others, as it was intended.

Those who truly love the outdoors have a deep respect for all of creation and take an active role in keeping our precious resources alive and healthy for future generations. Here in the United States, millions of acres of wildlife refuge, and the very existence of certain species of animals, are the direct result of funding and implementation by hunters and fishermen. I would dare say that no other group cares more about these things than the hunting and fishing community. And it's not out of selfishness so that we can "have more things to kill," as some would say, but rather, our concern flows from a hyper-awareness of the intrinsic life-sustaining and soul-nourishing value of these great gifts.

No people are more intimately connected to the wild world than outdoors men and women. We are the first and truest environmentalists! We don't just admire and cherish these gifts of nature but also responsibly practice hands-on management of them for future generations — and this is why the vast majority of hunters and fishing men and women have the utmost respect for their quarry and the land that supports it. This is also why we only take what we need or can give to others. There are programs in place throughout the United States in which hunters are able to harvest deer (and other game animals) from severely overpopulated areas (a deadly situation for all) and give the meat to the poor. As the Lord fed the multitudes with fish and bread, so we feed the hungry with venison. Meanwhile, some well known organizations that claim to be concerned with "humane" causes do nothing for the promotion of the humane treatment of human beings, who are made in the image and likeness of God.

Please keep this in mind: a governing rule of life on earth is that something must die for something else to live. Hunters and fishermen know firsthand the price their food has paid; thus, they foster a sense of the sacred in what they do and what they eat. A true hunter understands the paradox of taking life. It is sad to see a beautiful animal die. It is not fun to watch the spark of life dwindle away from a creature's eye, knowing that one is directly responsible for its death. But along with this comes the satisfaction and sense of joy in being an active participant in the cycle of life and having harvested an animal/fish

with a humane kill, true respect, sacred reverence, and deep gratitude to God. Other natural predators are not so thoughtful or kind — and neither is Mother Nature, who “thins the herd” with disease and starvation. As the spark of life fades from our quarry’s eyes, it enlightens and sustains the spark in ours. Death gives way to life in more ways than one. If a hunter’s or fisherman’s killing only gives way to death, then it’s time to quit. These are the principles I — and all serious outdoors men and women — live by. Regarding hunting and the death of animals, here are a few other things to consider:

*\*If you buy meat, fish, or poultry from the market, then you have had a hand in the death of those creatures- you have paid someone else to do it and thus have completely removed yourself from the direct cycle of life.*

*\*If you are a vegetarian and buy your vegetables from mainstream grocery stores, you are still responsible for the death of animals. Why? Because, nationwide, millions of animals are killed in the process of growing food. Some are eradicated because of their destruction of crops and others are killed accidentally as a result of harvesting methods. It is in many ways more “humane” to hunt or fish for one’s food than to buy it.*

*\*If you feed your dog or cat the usual store-bought pet food, here again you have had a hand in killing animals. One of the main ingredients in dog/cat food is meat byproducts. (And don’t forget that our furry friends are natural hunters, too!)*

*\*Many wineries and nurseries have to (legally) slaughter as many deer as possible to keep them from destroying grapes and plants...so you can have nice shrubs and a superb glass of merlot! But even in such cases, the meat is still given to the needy.*

*\*If you live in a new house in the suburbs, you may be responsible for the death of animals in another way: your new home has destroyed their habitat and displaced them.*

*\*Predatory attacks on humans, auto collisions, plane crashes, massive habitat destruction from over browsing, the decimation of rare song birds and other animals are all highest in areas where there is no hunting.*

*\*States that ban the hunting of certain animals often end up spending a fortune to later hire “sharpshooters” to balance numbers. As a result, far more animals are killed by the state....not hunters.... who would have kept both the cost down and the animals responsibly in check.*

*\*Deer sterilization drugs (which are incredibly expensive and extremely difficult to administer effectively) are derived from slaughtered pigs. Killing one animal to thin out others?????*

The bottom line concerning hunting and fishing is that every living creature on earth, with few exceptions, must seek out (hunt), kill, and eat other living things: plants, fruits, and all forms of vegetation; bugs, birds, fish, and other animals. This is a simple fact of life on earth. To deny it, to reject it, or to otherwise turn a blind eye to the reality of the food chain is pure ignorance. In Sacred Scripture, we see clearly that mankind was created in the “image and likeness” of God. We were made the stewards of creation — and with that responsibility, we were given dominion over animals, along with the command to care for and use them properly.

Throughout the Bible, we read about the killing of animals by various means — including hunting and fishing — for food, clothing, and sacrifice. We learn that Jesus ate fish and declared all foods (including meat) as “clean” (see Mk 7:14-19 and Acts 10:9-16). As a Jew, Jesus would have also eaten lamb. Contrary to the ridiculous propositions of “animal rights” groups, Jesus was certainly not a vegetarian. And don’t forget that his first disciples were, in fact, fishermen! Hunting and fishing are as natural and healthy as breathing the air that keeps us alive. There is simply no reason to apologize for becoming an active, respectful, genuine “environmental watchdog,” a considerate participant in the food chain, and putting food on the table, and in the freezer, by one’s own efforts.