



Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time October 1, 2017 A

Respect Life Sunday

- Phil Warwick shares his perspective on three life issues
- Some excerpts from *A Life to Live*

Last Tuesday morning, as I was struggling with my column for Respect Life Sunday, I was moved to ask Phil Warwick if he would be willing to share his perspective on some life issues. By 5:30pm, he had emailed me what follows. I was very impressed and grateful that Phil could write such an excellent personal reflection on three important life issues in such a short time. Phil and Barb have been active members of our parish since 1989. For many years, they created and operated the *Gift of Water* project, which provided clean drinking water for thousands of families in Haiti and Jamaica. Currently, Phil is in his second year of formation to become a permanent deacon for our Diocese and parish.

THREE LIFE ISSUES

When Fr. Tobin asked me to write this reflection on Respect Life, I immediately focused on three highly personal respect life concerns: pro-life, environment, and immigration.

Protecting the life of the unborn child

Many years ago, I was visiting an elderly lady, Margaret, in a nursing home. Margaret was fading quickly, struggled with lucidity, and could no longer see well. She whispered,

“Alfred, is that you?”

“No, it’s Phillip.”

“Alfred, I need to tell you something. When I was pregnant with you, it was the middle of the depression, and your father was without work. We were so poor and had three other children to feed. The day I learned I was pregnant, the nurse told me I could do something about it. I knew what she meant.” She paused and sobbed for a while. “I am so sorry, Alfred. I am so sorry that I ever thought of taking your life. I am so proud of you and your four little boys.”

I was stunned into silence. “Alfred, please forgive me,” she cried.

“I forgive you ... thank you,” I whispered.

Margaret was my grandmother; Alfred is my father. I am one of those “four little boys.”

That day my heart became pro-life. To be in love with God, *the Lover of all souls*, is to be in love with His creation, especially the pinnacle of creation: humanity. To be in love with humanity means to recognize how fragile we are and how life from “womb to tomb” must be cherished and protected with the utmost urgency.

St. Pope JOHN PAUL II wrote, “*The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.*” (Section 38, paragraph 2, CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI, Dec 30, 1988)

Pro-life today must challenge a growing culture of death through many issues:

- In February 2017, two Planned Parenthood (PPI) former employees reported that “Each clinic has abortion quotas.” PPI performs ~30% of all U.S. abortions.
- Studies correlate abortion with domestic violence; ~70% of post-abortive women feel that they did not have a “choice.”
- Assisted suicide is legal in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Vermont, California, Colorado and Washington, D.C.
- China, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and the United States carried out the most executions in 2016.

The Pro-life movement does applaud some recent political changes, motivated primarily by the Trump administration:

- No federal funding may be used to support any international organization supporting abortion in any form.
- States may deny federal funding to any abortion provider. 20 states have done so.
- Religious organizations do not have to provide coverage for elective abortive procedures or any form of “preventive services” that violate conscience.

Environment

Pope John Paul II clearly and rightly sets a priority for the focus of respect life on life issues. Many people feel Pope Francis has watered down life issues with his focus, such as care for creation (*LAUDATO SI*). I believe, however, he is trying to broaden our view of life issues from a third world perspective. From my personal experience, environmental issues are life issues:

In 1993, I was volunteering in a hospital ward in the Dominican Republic when a small child died of severe dehydration from polluted water. That child would today be the same age as my adult daughter, Sarah. What if that were *my child*?

The #1 killer of children in most western hemisphere countries is not abortion. (U.S. and Canada are notable exceptions.) It is the environment. As another example, mass deforestation in Haiti has destabilized the country’s traditional tropical rainfall season and decimated crop production. Haiti can no longer feed itself. Children starve to death just 750 miles from Melbourne. I still have a couple “mud cookies”: a mixture of a little flour and clay used to fill a child’s stomach and keep it from hurting.

It may be true that no one person uses an instrument of violence to bring about starvation or death from water pollution. However, we have the means and the basic technologies to correct such life and death issues. Isn’t this a matter of how we chose to share our wealth and resources (i.e., a sin of omission)?

As a parish, we have the unique opportunity to partner with St. Michael’s School for developmentally disabled children in northwest New Mexico. The school aids and houses special needs children of the Navajo Nation. Even in the United States, environmental problems exist and threaten life.

Jesus, *the Lover of all souls*, wants us to love all souls!

Immigration

People most often do not want to leave their homeland. *They leave to live* – whether it be for lack of food, or

lack of work to provide for food, or profound violence surrounding them. To understand the plight of a refugee is to understand that this is a life issue.

Most of us are descendants of immigrants who reluctantly left their homelands to live. My immigrant ancestors are Irish, Scandinavian, English, Welsh, German, and Polish. Not every immigrant ancestor of mine was a “knight in shining armor,” and very few would get through the immigration process today. More than one left their homeland because they were in some sort of trouble. (I suppose that explains a lot.)

My own experience of Haitians is that people in Haiti survive because of the financial support from relatives in the U.S.A. and Canada. Many are “illegal.” Not every immigrant is “perfect,” but the vast majority work very hard. In fact, studies show that many American manufacturers prefer immigrant employees. Why? They have a better work ethic.

By one estimate, border-based drug cartels control ~90% of undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Human trafficking therefore closely links to immigration. Victims who can’t pay the cartel crossing fees have to “earn it,” mainly through prostitution, drug smuggling, or slave labor. This affects an estimated 800,000 women and girls every year. Florida is the third largest hub of human trafficking, and three of the largest human trafficking busts in the past four years resulted in arrests in Brevard County!

Jesus, *the Lover of all souls*, makes “welcoming the stranger” paramount to our understanding of love. What can we do?

- Simplify the immigration process. Every country has the right to protect itself from terrorists and criminals. However, a typical application can be very long, go through multiple technical rejections, and take years to process. How can we expect an illiterate mother with hungry children to apply?
- Allow “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA). Removing teens and children would be a humanitarian crisis.
- Educate oneself on signs of human trafficking.

Closing thoughts: I fully understand that we most often are divided on Respect Life issues based on political party. We should, however, ask ourselves: Are we first a Catholic or first a Republican? Are we first a Catholic or first a Democrat?

We are not called to the same ministry, and wouldn't that be foolish if we were? If we are first, Catholic, and second, Republican, maybe our call is to work pro-life issues, while sensitizing other Republicans to why the Church teaches what it does on the environment, immigration, and human trafficking. If we are first, Catholic, and second, Democrat, maybe our call is to work environmental and immigration issues, while sensitizing other Democrats to why the Church teaches what it does on abortion and euthanasia.

One thing Jesus, the Lover of all souls, does call us to, as Catholics, is unity. No matter what, let us respect what we are: the Body of Christ. (End of Phil's reflection)

A Life to Live—Awakening to God's Presence

While in Ireland this past summer, I picked up the above titled book which I am currently reading. The following are some excerpts from it.

1. *"What calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eye of the heart with which God is to be seen."* (St. Augustine)

2. *"Keep your gaze upon Jesus; in him all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment."* (Pope Francis)

3. Old myths and legends express it this way: Before we were born, God kissed and caressed our souls. That left a permanent mark, an imprint of a love so deep and pure that we go through life wanting to return to the original experience of such tender love. The memory of God's kiss and caress has created a sacred space deep inside our hearts that is personal and precious. It is the place where our inner instincts, our restlessness, our desire for God are all deeply rooted.

4. Look into the depths of your heart and ask yourself: Do you have a heart that desires something great, or a heart that has been lulled to sleep by things? God awaits you; God seeks you. (Pope Francis)

5. St. Augustine was convinced that the deepest and most intimate encounter with God's abiding presence takes place in the inner self—in the human heart, soul and spirit. He discovered this in his own experience. He felt that before his conversion, he had been searching for God in all the wrong places—outside of himself. Then came the day when a soft, peaceful light streamed into his soul and he awakened to the presence of God in his

own heart. He wrote about it later in his *Confessions*: *'You were within me, while I was outside ... you were with me but I was not with you.'* After many years of searching ('watching out') for God, he found rest at last when he became aware of the One Eternal God who had always been present deep in his heart.

6. Sharon Commins from Dublin, and Hilda her companion, were captured in Darfur, Sudan, in 2009. They were held hostage for 107 days. It was a terrifying ordeal. After returning to Dublin, Sharon wrote the following message of thanks in the newspapers.

Hilda and I sought sanctuary in prayer during our one hundred and seven days in captivity. Prayer gave us the strength to cope with the despair and loneliness on the mountain. Prayer sustained us when virtually all hope was gone and protected us from the crippling fear and deep sadness. Every morning we prayed for the strength and courage to get through the hours. We knew the God we shared would help reunite us safely with our families.... Before settling in to sleep, we prayed that guardian angels would remain with us throughout the night and watch over us until daylight. We are both safe today—and I have no doubt in my mind that our combined prayers made a difference.

7. Contemplative prayer is a way of being really inside of our daily experiences.

8. *"When we prefer to gossip, gossip about others, criticize others – these are everyday things that happen to everyone, including me – these are the 'temptations of the evil one,' who does not want the Spirit to come to us and bring about peace and meekness in the Christian community. These struggles always exist in the parish, in the family, among friends. Through the Spirit we are born into a new life that is meek and charitable."*

(Pope Francis)

Have a blessed week,

Sharon