



**Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Respect Life Sunday**  
**October 2, 2016 C**

**RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY**

- **The call to be PRO-LIFE from womb to tomb**
- **Parts 2 and 3 of the US Bishops’ document on Faithful Citizenship**

Today marks *Respect Life Sunday* for all Catholic Churches in the United States. It is a day when all of us are invited to reflect on and pray about how we think and feel about the many life issues.

As Catholics, we teach and believe that all human life is sacred and precious to God because he created all life in his *image and likeness*. Whenever human life is not treated with reverence and respect, God is dishonored. We should speak out when we see human life destroyed, diminished and grossly disrespected, as in the following ways:

**Abortion.** Each day, over 4,000 pre-born infants are slaughtered, that is, over one million a year. Fr. John Powell, S.J., called this phenomenon *The Silent Holocaust*.

**Social Justice** seeks to remove from society all forms of unjust structures, e.g., paying men more than women for doing the same work, laws that favor the rich over the poor.

**Hunger** is a crisis that is rising to epic proportions. In a world of plenty, allowing 30,000 people to die daily of *hunger* is a scandal.

**Domestic Violence.** About every 20 seconds, a woman is battered in our country. About two million children are abused each year by one or both parents or a relative. Thousands of elderly Americans are subjected to physical or verbal abuse each year. In our nation, people are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten or even killed by a family member in their own home than any place else or by anyone else. Such violence occurs in families of all races, religions, education levels and income groups.

**Human Trafficking** is rampant involving children and adults for purposes of prostitution and slave labor.

Other important human life issues of concern to *Respect Life Sunday* include euthanasia, capital punishment, stem cell research, gang violence, war, and health care.

Today, or any other Sunday, we should ask ourselves where we stand on these issues. Fr. Frank Pavone writes: *While no one person or group can be expected to be actively involved in all of the above issues, no one person or group is free to be unconcerned about any attack on the dignity of human life, nor are we free to ignore the interdependence of all the efforts on behalf of human life. There are numerous activities being carried out in defense of human dignity. While there may not be room for all of them in our schedule, there must be room for all of them in our heart.*

**Reflection question: Am I pro-life on some issues and anti-life or indifferent on others?**

In Newark in 1995, the late Pope John Paul II spoke these words to all Americans:

*Your country stands upon the world scene as a model of a democratic society at an advanced stage of development. Your power of example carries with it heavy responsibilities. Use it well, America!*

On some or even many issues in life, we can “agree to disagree” as, for instance, on the type of church music we prefer. But when it comes to respect and care for the human person—born and unborn—we *cannot* agree to disagree. We are either pro-life, that is, from womb to tomb (all the way, not half-way) or we are anti-life. As Fr. Pavone states above, we may not have room in our schedules for all of the human life issues, but we must have room in our hearts.

**Living the Gospel of Life.** About fifteen years ago, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement called *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*. The following are a few excerpts which include a quote from Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to Baltimore in 1995.

*This nobility of the American spirit endures today in those who struggle for social justice and equal opportunity for the disadvantaged. The United States has thrived because, at its best, it embodies a commitment to human freedom, human rights and human dignity. This is why the Holy Father tells us: “...As Americans, you are rightly proud of your country’s great achievements. (Giant Stadium, 1995)*

*But success often bears the seeds of failure. U.S.*

*economic and military power has sometimes led to great injustices abroad. At home, it has fueled self-absorption, indifference and consumerist excess. Overconfidence in our power, made even more pronounced by advances in science and technology, has created the illusion of a life without natural boundaries and actions without consequences. The standards of the marketplace, instead of being guided by sound morality, threaten to displace it. We are now witnessing the gradual restructuring of American culture according to ideals of utility, productivity and cost-effectiveness. It is a culture where moral questions are submerged by a river of goods and services and where the misuse of marketing and public relations subverts public life.*

Having commented on the many sad ways that we in this country disrespect life, the bishops write:

*It needn't be so. God, the Father of all nations, has blessed the American people with a tremendous reservoir of goodness. He has also graced our founders with the wisdom to establish political structures enabling all citizens to participate in promoting the inalienable rights of all. As Americans, as Catholics and as pastors of our people, we write therefore today **to call our fellow citizens back to our country's founding principles, and most especially to renew our national respect for the rights of those who are unborn, weak, disabled and terminally ill.** Real freedom rests on the inviolability of every person as a child of God. The inherent value of human life, at every stage and in every circumstance, is not a sectarian issue any more than the Declaration of Independence is a sectarian creed.*

**Reflection question: Am I more loyal to my political party's platform on some moral issues than I am to Church teaching?**

**Words of comfort for women who have had an abortion.** In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life), Pope John Paul II wrote these words of comfort for women who have had an abortion:

*I would like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors that may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that, in many cases, it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly, what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try, rather, to understand what happened and face it honestly.*

*If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come*

*to understand that nothing is definitely lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. (#94)*

A simple yet profound way each of us can live the Gospel of Life is by treating our own family, our neighbors, strangers, and especially the poor, with respect and dignity. If we speak to others in a disrespectful and rude manner, we have no right getting all hot about other life issues.

**Reflection question: How is my conscience formed when it comes to life issues—through reflection on the Scriptures, Church teaching, or through the prevailing opinion of the culture?**

## **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, by the US Bishops**

Last weekend, I shared with you excerpts from Part 1 of the above document. This weekend, I offer a few more excerpts from Parts 2-3.

### **Part 2: Applying Catholic Teaching to Major Issues: A Summary of Policy Positions of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops**

The bishops begin Part 2 with the following:

*Politics is a noble mission to promote the common good. As such, it is about ethics and principles as well as issues, candidates, and officeholders. To engage in "politics," then, is more than getting involved in current polemics and debates; it is about acting with others and through institutions for the benefit of all. The fact that much of our political rhetoric has become very negative and that political polarization seems to have grown should not dissuade us from the high calling to work for a world that allows everyone to thrive, a world in which all persons, all families, have what they need to fulfill their God-given destiny. In our democracy, one aspect of this task for all of us requires that we weigh issues and related policies. In this brief summary, we bishops call attention to issues with significant moral dimensions that should be carefully considered in each campaign and as policy decisions are made in the years to come. As the descriptions below indicate, some issues involve principles that can never be abandoned, such as the fundamental right to life and marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Others reflect our judgment about the best way to apply Catholic principles to policy issues. No summary could fully reflect the depth and details of the positions taken through the work of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). While people of good will may sometimes choose different ways to apply and act on some of our principles, Catholics cannot ignore their inescapable moral challenges or simply dismiss the Church's guidance or policy directions that flow from these principles. For a more complete review of these policy directions and their*

moral foundations, see the statements listed at the end of this document. (Para 63)

The next several pages of the document have statements on:

- ◆ **Human life**—which includes abortion, euthanasia, cloning and the destruction of human embryos, genocide, torture and the direct or indirect targeting of noncombatants in war and terrorist attacks (Paras 64-67)
- ◆ **Avoiding war, promoting peace** which includes a quote by Pope Francis on the killing of Christians. He says that there are “more martyrs in the church today than in the first centuries.” There is a statement of support for those who serve in the military.
- ◆ **Marriage and Family Life.** Para 70 states: The family founded upon marriage is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities. **Marriage** must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong exclusive commitment between a man and a woman, and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children. The institution of marriage is undermined by the ideology of “gender” that dismisses sexual difference and the complementarity of the sexes and falsely presents “gender” as nothing more than a social construct or psychological reality, which a person may choose at variance with his or her biological reality.
- ◆ **Religious Freedom** (Para 72)
- ◆ **Economic Justice—caring for the poor**
- ◆ **Health Care, Migration, Catholic Education, Combating Unjust Discrimination, Care for our Common Homes and Global Solidarity**

### **Part 3: Goals for Political Life: Challenges for Citizens, Candidates, and Public Officials**

After a brief introductory paragraph, this section reads:

*Catholic teaching challenges voters and candidates, citizens and elected officials, to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues. In light of ethical principles, we bishops offer the following policy goals that we hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices. Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve intrinsically evil acts, which can never be approved. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek the common good. These and similar goals can help voters and candidates act on ethical principles rather than particular interests and partisan allegiances. We hope Catholics will ask candidates how they intend to help our nation pursue these important goals:*

- *Address the preeminent requirement to protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through*

*abortion and providing women in crisis pregnancies the supports they need to make a decision for life.*

- *Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems—a million abortions each year to deal with unwanted pregnancies, euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability, the destruction of human embryos in the name of research, the use of the death penalty to combat crime, and imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.*
- *Protect the fundamental understanding of marriage as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman and as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject false “gender” ideologies; and provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.*
- *Achieve comprehensive immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents the separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.*
- *Help families and children overcome poverty: ensuring access to and choice in education, as well as decent work at fair, living wages and adequate assistance for the vulnerable in our nation, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world, especially in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.*
- *Provide health care while respecting human life, human dignity, and religious freedom in our health care system.*
- *Continue to oppose policies that reflect prejudice, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of unjust discrimination.*
- *Encourage families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation, with full respect for individuals and groups and their right to address social needs in accord with their basic moral and religious convictions.*
- *Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force—examining for what purposes it may be used, under what authority, and at what human cost—with a special view to seeking a responsible and effective response for ending the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and other parts of the world.*
- *Join with others around the world to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.*

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saron*

## *A Prayer for Life*

*Loving God, Creator of all,  
we recognize that life is a gift from you.*

*Open our hearts to your Holy Spirit  
and renew in us a deep respect for all persons:  
the family, the unborn, the young, the adult,  
the sick, the disabled, the abused, the imprisoned,  
the aged, the dying, the homeless, the unemployed,  
and the oppressed in any way.*

*Bless all of us and instill in us  
a deep love for your gift of life.*

*Through the intercession of Mary,  
Mother and Virgin,  
may all our words and actions  
foster reverence for human life.*

*May we be true witnesses to the truth  
that all life is precious and has sublime dignity.*

*Lead our nation and our world to this understanding  
so that we may be a people dedicated  
to the protection of all your sons and daughters.*

*We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
the Word Who became flesh and lived among us.*

*Amen.*