



Twenty-Seventh in Ordinary Time October 5, 2014 A

RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY Respecting Life from Womb to Tomb

Today is Respect Life Sunday. Each year, the Catholic Church in America sets aside the month of October to focus on life issues. As followers of Jesus, we are called to cultivate a “culture of life” to counteract the “culture of death” in our nation and world. A culture of life seeks to foster respect for all human life—from conception to death. In our time, there are many threats to human life, e.g., abortion, extreme poverty, war, terrorism, human trafficking, domestic violence, euthanasia and capital punishment.

Respecting the life of the unborn child. Since the Supreme Court legalized abortion in our nation, over 40 million conceived babies were not given a chance to experience life outside the womb of their mothers—a phenomenon that has been called *American’s Silent Holocaust*. It could also be called the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, an event that happened shortly after Jesus’ birth (see Matt 3:16-18). This silent holocaust has not only impacted the lives of unborn children but also of the millions of mothers, emotionally and spiritually, as well as those who work in the abortion industry.

When it comes to the issue of abortion, many politicians today like Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi, both Catholic, say they are personally opposed to abortion but would not want to take that right or choice away from women. It is like saying: “I am personally opposed to slavery, but I would not want to take that right away from those who believe it is morally acceptable.”

At a Prayer Breakfast in the White House in 1994, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta spoke the following words: *“If we can accept that a mother can kill her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? Any country that sanctions abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what it wants.”*

Compassion for those who have had an abortion. In his encyclical *Gospel of Life*, the late Pope John Paul II states: *“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 with the Lord” (94).

Ministries like *Project Rachel* have helped large numbers of women recover from the wound of abortion. For more information, see www.hopeafterabortion.org.) Over the years through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I have been able, with the grace of God, to help many women experience God’s mercy for this bad choice.

Some of the many reasons for abortion. Women who have had an abortion know many of the reasons why a woman may make a decision to end her unborn child’s life. The following are some of the reasons:

- Some women without a faith background may not believe that there is anything wrong with having an abortion.
- Some women may undergo several abortions convinced that it is an easy way to solve the problem of unplanned pregnancy.
- Some women may be pressured into having an abortion by the father of the child or by parents. They have zero support when it comes to keeping and caring for the child.
- Some young unmarried women may be totally scared of having an unwanted child.
- Some women, often educated ones, may see an unplanned pregnancy as an inconvenience and a threat to their career.
- Some women may believe that abortion is terribly wrong but may feel overwhelmed by the thought of having and caring for an unwanted child.
- Some women may be compelled to seek an abortion upon discovering that their unborn child is deformed in some way. (What other reasons or circumstances did I miss?)

Of course, *none* of the above is a valid reason for choosing to end the life of an unborn child. But in the confessional, some of the reasons would fall under the category of mitigating circumstances. Also, naming the above reasons may be helpful to us so that we can refrain from harshly judging someone for whom an abortion may have been an excruciating decision. Women, especially those who know that abortion is wrong, often greatly suffer emotionally and spiritually for having terminated the life of their unborn child.

Lowering the number of abortions by reaching out to women who live in poverty. It would seem to me that we, as a nation, are a long ways away from overturning the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion. Even when George W. Bush was President and had for six years a majority in the Senate and Congress, very little progress had been made in this area. It seems the most that can be done is to pass legislation to restrict abortion. But dedicated pro-life activists have done a great job closing down abortion clinics. *Crisis Pregnancy Centers* do a lot of good work helping women deal with crisis pregnancies. Our local Knights of Columbus are seeking to purchase an ultrasound machine for the local ***Crisis Pregnancy Center*** here in Melbourne. I am hoping some of you will donate to this good cause. The parish will give \$5,000 towards the \$15,000 purchase. Another important way for us as a nation to lower the number of abortions occurring each day is by helping young women who live in poverty and feel helpless to care for an unplanned child.

Adoption. Adopting a child is a wonderful pro-life decision, one that many of our parishioners have made. Adopting a ***special needs child*** is an extraordinarily generous act. We have the St. Gabriel family from our own parish who is in the process of adopting a deaf five-year old boy from an orphanage in China. (More on this extraordinary act of generosity in the coming weeks.)

Death Penalty

Sadly, America is the only country in the Western world that believes the killing of a criminal is the right way to protect society. Some years ago, Bishop Snyder, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of St. Augustine, named 11 compelling reasons why we as a nation should end the death penalty.

1. The death penalty is irreversible. It is an absolute certainty that innocent people have been killed by the state, and will continue to be killed occasionally, as long as we retain the death penalty.

2. The death penalty is not a deterrent. The deterrent value of the death penalty, as opposed to other criminal sanctions, has never been demonstrated. In fact, it has been responsibly suggested that the death penalty may have just the opposite effect.

3. The death penalty is exorbitantly expensive. Stringent guidelines from the U.S. Supreme Court make capital cases far more expensive than holding the offender in prison for life. Each execution costs taxpayers from \$2 to \$6 million.

4. The death penalty weakens law enforcement. Every case designated for death penalty prosecution requires an inordinate investment of law enforcement resources, thus depriving society of resources and effort that would otherwise be devoted to solving crimes.

5. The use of the death penalty is intrinsically capricious and there is no way to correct it in the justice system governed by our constitution. Since 1977 there have been about 200,000 homicides in our country. There have been 106 executions. Most of those executed were victims of the luck of the draw. For example, in May of 1979, John Speinkelink, a California drifter convicted of killing a fellow drifter, went to the electric chair in Florida. That same month, Dan White, a former San Francisco County supervisor was found guilty only of manslaughter for killing the mayor and a supervisor and received a seven-year, eight-month sentence.

6. The death penalty is unfair. When a defendant goes on trial for his or her life, guilt or innocence will invariably be decided by a "death qualified jury" whose members are morally untroubled by the death penalty. The defendant should have a right to a trial by a jury from which individuals more likely to be sympathetic have not been systematically excluded.

7. The death penalty is cruel and unusual. The history of the use of the death penalty during recent years is replete with accounts of horrible examples of botched executions.

8. The death penalty is destructive to the families of victims. Because of the many long years of appeal, the families of victims are unable to begin the process of giving closure to their grief.

9. The death penalty is creating an ever-growing problem for correctional systems across the country. More than 2,300 individuals are presently under sentence of death in the United States. From 200 to 300 are added to this number each year. Each of these

persons requires expensive, high security housing, as well as 24-hour close supervision and an inordinate amount of staff for other reasons.

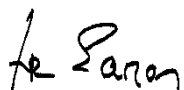
10. The death penalty is a relic of less civilized times and is not favored by the American people. A national survey commissioned by the Justice Department a year and a half ago showed that only 37 percent of those polled preferred the death penalty over legislatable options. With the exception of South Africa, the United States is the only industrialized country in the free world in which the death penalty is used.

11. The death penalty is racially biased. Why is it that nearly half of the people on our death rows are black in a country that is less than 15 percent black? Studies have established the connection between death penalty and racial bias.

In 1999, the U.S. Bishops issued a *Good Friday statement* on the death penalty, part of which states: *“Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocents by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life. Through education, through advocacy, and through prayer and contemplation on the life of Jesus, we must commit ourselves to a persistent and principled witness against the death penalty, against a culture of death, and for the Gospel of Life.”*

In Ezekiel 18:23. God, speaking through the prophet, says he desires not the death of the sinner, but that the sinner repents and lives.

Have a blessed week,



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.