



Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time October 6, 2013 C

RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY

The call to be PRO-LIFE from womb to tomb

In our first reading today, the not so well known prophet Habakkuk, who lived several hundred years before Christ, gives voice to the violence that he sees occurring. He also expresses his frustration with God for not doing something about it. Habakkuk writes:

How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you "Violence!" but you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin, why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and clamorous discord.

A prayer like the above should give us all permission to express our frustration with our God when we feel that he is ignoring our plea. *Honest* expression of how we truly feel is so important for a healthy prayer life.

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.

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.

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?

Have a blessed week,

Le Saran

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.