



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 gives voice to the violence that he sees occurring when he lived several hundred years before Christ. 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 what we are truly feeling is so important for a healthy prayer life.

This Sunday is called *Respect Life Sunday* in the Catholic Churches in the United States. It is the Sunday when all of us are invited to reflect on and pray about how human life is respected or disrespected in our nation and global family.

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 and we should speak up. Human life can be destroyed, diminished and grossly disrespected in many ways such as:

- **Abortion.** Over 4,000 pre-born infants are slaughtered daily or over one million a year. Fr. John Powell, S.J. has called this phenomenon, *The Silent Holocaust*.
- **Social Justice Issues.** Last Sunday I spoke about the True Cost of Low Prices—the violence of globalization. Such economic practices daily show complete disregard for millions of workers.
- In a world of plenty allowing 30,000 people to die 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 subject 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** of children and adults for purposes of prostitution and slave labor.

- **Respect Life Sunday** also involves reflection on euthanasia, capital punishment, stem cell research, gang violence, war, health care issues - over 40 million Americans have no health care insurance.

On this Sunday or any Sunday we should ask ourselves where we stand on these issues.

- Am I pro-life on some issues and anti-life or indifferent to other life 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.

- 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?
- Am I *more* loyal to my political party on some moral issues than I am to church teaching?

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 life issues we cannot 'agree to disagree'

On some or even many issues in life we can 'agree to disagree' e.g., what kind of music we like in church, but when it comes to respect and care for human persons born and unborn we cannot agree to disagree. Either we are pro-life all the way from womb to tomb or we are anti-life. As Fr. Pavone stated above, we may not have room in our schedules for all of the above issues, but we must have room in our hearts.

Living the Gospel of Life

Almost ten 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 from it. Quoting the late John Paul II in his visit to Baltimore in 1995, the bishops write:

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.

Word of Comfort For Women who have had an Abortion.

In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life), the late Pope John Paul 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 that each of us can live the Gospel of Life is by treating the members of our own family, neighbors, strangers and the poor with respect and dignity. If we speak to others in disrespectful ways, we have no right becoming all hot about other life issues

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 you sons and daughters.*

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

Have a blessed week,

