

*Respect Life Sunday Homily 10/5/2008
St. Jude Parish, Londonderry, NH*

In the first creation story in the Book of Genesis we learn that God created man and woman in his divine image - - - and all that he created was good. We are indeed created by God in his image and the life he has given to every human being is to be respected and protected.

The late Joseph Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago, who taught us about the “seamless garment”, reminded us that “each life is of infinite value” and he insisted on the need to establish a “consistent ethic of life” in America - to bring religious values and convictions into the nation’s public life and culture. We are a Pro Life Church and all Catholics are called to support the Pro Life ethic of our faith . . . to live the culture of life, to reject the culture of death regardless of political correctness or secular humanistic rationalism and relativism.

Today, Respect Life Sunday, we are called to reflect on the dignity, value and sanctity of human life in every form, at every stage, in every condition, in every situation – from conception to natural death without exception. We are made in the image and likeness of God and as such, we are called to respect all life which is a gift from God.

As Catholics, we are called to nurture and care for human life through a system of quality health care, which is accessible and equal to all. We are called to defend human life against the horror of termination through abortion for the sake of convenience, against all forms of euthanasia, against the cloning of human beings, against genocide, against embryonic stem cell research which uses and destroys living human embryos and threatens to create a new industry of harvesting the unborn especially since science has demonstrated that adult stems cells, placenta stem cells, umbilical cord stem cells, amniotic fluid stem cells are equally productive or more so. We are called to defend life against capital punishment and revenge. We are called to preserve the sanctity of marriage as defined by the church and to protect the human family

We are called to defend life against the threats of war and terrorism - against ethnic cleansing and massacre - against oppression and prejudice, against all forms of racism and discrimination which deprive our brothers and sisters from the basic necessities and freedoms of life.

We are called to aid those who have suffered from natural disasters, to provide aid and comfort to the homeless, to feed the hungry, to work toward the end of poverty, to give hope to those living without hope, to comfort the grieving, to assist the abandoned and to work for Social Justice.

As followers of Jesus Christ we must bring our witness and value system to bear on civic life and on a society plagued with indifference – an indifference which allows life to be taken without moral justification.

We live in a society, which sustains and supports millions of direct abortions annually and supports the willful destruction of the unborn that may have birth defects – as if the establishment of quality control in the maternity ward to determine the value of an unborn child is acceptable. It isn't and never should be!

There are those who propose public funding be made available for embryonic stem cell research – the destruction of human life when other alternatives are available – the destruction of human life for experimentation in the hope that others can be helped by the willful destruction of a human live embryo. With the exception of unavoidable self defense, it is never acceptable to take one life to benefit another, regardless of what a politician or Hollywood actor or actress may say.

Even scientists, members of the medical profession and non Christians faith believe that life begins at conception. To willfully destroy an embryo for stem cell research is a grave moral and ethical disorder which cannot be defended. We give more protection to the embryos of Bald Eagles, snail darters, spotted salamanders and other animals than we do the human embryo. I find that offensive and so should you!

We live in a society which is in favor of capital punishment, and which is rapidly moving toward shortsighted acceptance of assisted suicide and euthanasia. Where do we draw the line? Do we move along the slippery slope and determine which life is worth living and which is not? This trend must stop!

We must have the courage and conviction of our faith as Catholic Christians to say “no” to a society, which promotes a culture of death rather than a culture of life . . . to say “no” to the willful destruction of human life . . . to say no to systems, ideologies and structures which will lead us as children of God toward moral and ethical bankruptcy.

We need to act with commitment and civility - - - with dignity and respect . . . with advocacy and restraint, but act we must!

All human life is a gift that flows directly from God . . . a gift, entrusted to each of us. We do not have the right to terminate, experiment with or to degrade human life in any circumstance. Yes we live in freedom. But freedom does not mean we do what we feel like doing but we do what we ought to do for the preservation of life.

Jesus speaks to us in the Scriptures, yet there are those who ignore him. Christ present in the poor, the marginalized, the abandoned, the forgotten, and the hungry - - - yet, as with those who passed Jesus on the cross at Calvary, there are still those in our society who also look the other way and refuse to see the suffering Christ.

Christ is present in the unborn, innocent children and helpless elderly, but like many a bystander on Calvary, there are those who refuse to get involved, who refuse to act.

God made each of us and he made us stewards of his creation. Not just the water, air and environment – but all creation especially his children. He called us to follow him as disciples. He made us tenants of his vineyard as we see in today’s Gospel reading.

When God sent Jesus, his only Son, to collect our debt of obedient love rightfully due him - we dragged Jesus outside and killed him. Today, when he returns in the weak, the broken, the abused, the hopeless, the homeless, the hungry, the unborn and the voiceless, far too many turn aside and leave him to die again.

Cardinal Bernadin was right . . . “Each life is of infinite value.” Without exception! And we as Christians committed to the Gospel of Life – committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, have an obligation to Respect Life, all life – without exception! There is no room for political correctness or self-serving ideologies. Jesus came to heal not to harm – to save not to destroy. And just like those he called to journey with him, Jesus has called us to follow him, to walk in his footsteps, to proclaim the Good News, to defend life. Once human life becomes nothing more than a commodity to be used and abused as mankind wishes, then the fabric of the seamless garment begins to unweave and all else in this world has no value and no purpose. We must protect and defend the dignity and sanctity of human life – from conception to natural death. If we refuse, then for what can we hope in the future?