

Reflections By Deacon Charlie Salway

When I began preparing this week, I discovered to my surprise that the place I identified most closely with Paul was at that point of his not knowing what the future would hold; the realization of his being in a transitional period during which he didn't quite know what might lie ahead. I love Paul's words in his letter to the Philippians. Paul says, "*This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching out to what lies ahead I go straight for the goal*". It sounds great when Paul says it, but you know, it's tough to let go of the past, particularly when it is a happy past, and it's hard to let go of a comfortable, secure present to reach for some unknown future. That's tougher than it sounds. We're in transition around here. We don't know what the future will hold. If you feel just a little uncomfortable, you're in good company. That's how Paul felt.

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Joy is born out of deep, inner peace; peace which comes from knowing that we are really loved and accepted by God. My experience tells me that uptight people can never really experience joy. People who have everything screwed down real tight can never learn to dance. People who are not at peace with themselves, people who carry around the baggage of past hurts and failures, people who look at the world through the narrow lens of their own self-interest, people who just plain don't like themselves or others, can never really discover the joy that the Gospel promises. Only those who let go and discover the deep peace which comes in knowing we are loved simply because God chooses to accept and love us, can know the freedom. There is great joy that comes in knowing that we can trust the goodness and love of God. It's in that love that we discover the peace from which real joy flows.

"Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Real joy is shaped by a disciplined focus of our hearts and minds and souls on things that are good, things that are beautiful, things that are filled with the joy of the Spirit of Christ. To experience joy we have to set our minds on things that are really good, things which express the greatness and goodness and joy of God.

As we go forth, we must persevere and work to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves or who feel as if their lives are not worth living. In our efforts to follow the Lord and bear good fruit, there may be times when it is difficult. It may feel like the vineyard has been neglected, trampled, and laid to waste. But we can find strength and comfort in knowing the Lord has not abandoned us. The keeper of the vineyard has not forgotten his *cherished plant*.

During this Respect Life Month, ask Jesus how he is specifically calling *you* to follow in his footsteps. How is he calling you to care for the lives of your neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable?

What can we do? How do we respond? Here are some questions we can ask ourselves...

Do I help pregnant and parenting mothers in my community who need a shoulder to lean on or a helping hand?

Do I know how to support a loved one nearing death in a way that respects the gift of his or her life?

Do I inform myself of the Church's teachings and engage in the civic arena first as a follower of Christ?

Do I support and advocate for laws and policies that protect and defend human life?

Ask the Lord for an outpouring of grace, especially the graces of wisdom, humility, and courage, as well as open and generous hearts, that we may respond to his call to live the Gospel of life.

Live the Gospel of Life

Respect Life Reflection

Twenty-five years ago, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that the Gospel of life is at the *heart* of Jesus' saving message to the world (*Evangelium vitae* 1). In taking on human flesh, dwelling among us, and sacrificing his very life for our redemption, Christ reveals the profound dignity of *every* human person. This God-given dignity does not change with our stage of life, abilities, level of independence, or any other varying circumstance.

Rather, it is rooted in the permanent fact that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, created to share in the very life of God himself. The human person is a “manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory” (EV 34). And we must reflect this truth in how we act and how we treat one another.

The truth of the Gospel of life is at the foundation of who we are as followers of Christ. In his earthly life, Jesus provided the perfect model for how we are to love our neighbor and live out the Gospel call: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

*“to imitate Christ
and follow in his foot-
steps”*

The Gospel of Life 51

Jesus calls each of us to “care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible” (EV 87). The Gospel of life is intrinsic to the whole Christian life and foundational to the decisions we make on a daily basis. For, “the Gospel of God’s love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a *single and indivisible* Gospel” (EV 2, emphasis added).

In his encyclical on the Gospel of life, Pope St. John Paul II recognizes the full range of threats against human life, from poverty and malnutrition to murder and war. He places particular emphasis, however, on threats to life at its beginning and end—precisely when it is most in need of protection. In modern times, children in their mothers’ wombs and those approaching the end of their lives are certainly among the “least of these” in our world’s estimation. Practices such as abortion and assisted suicide tragically reject the truth that human life is always to be cherished and defended with loving concern.

As the Church celebrates the 25th anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II’s prophetic encyclical, let us reflect on how we personally live out the Gospel: *Do I talk about and act towards others as I would talk about and treat Jesus himself? Do I inform myself of the Church’s teachings and engage in the civic arena as first a follower of Christ? Do I support and advocate for laws and policies that protect and defend human life? Do I help pregnant and parenting mothers in need? Am I ready to support a loved one nearing death?*

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, may Our Lord grant us the grace to truly and courageously live his Gospel of life.

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