

27th Sunday Ordinary Time
October 4-5, 2014
Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Phil 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

While today may be Twin Cities Marathon Sunday outside our front steps, all throughout the nation is Respect Life Sunday, an annual observance of our Catholic Bishop's Conference that seeks to educate Catholics about our crucial duty to faithfully articulate respect for human life in all its stages, including issues such as euthanasia, cloning, and embryonic stem cell research. There are many and serious issues covered under this umbrella.

The first reading from the Book of Isaiah speaks eloquently and poetically of the human experience of growth, struggle, triumph and defeat. We are told that the crop of grapes only yielded "wild grapes," obviously less than tasty, perhaps even poisonous. The prophet's cry is a prediction of impending doom, of fruitlessness and barrenness, one of thorns and thistles.

Wild grapes are the fruits of a corrupt nature. Where grace does not dwell, corruption will. But the wickedness of those that profess religion, and enjoy the means of grace, must be upon the sinners themselves. When errors and vice go without check or control, the vineyard remains un-pruned; then it will soon be grown over with thorns, given over to grazing.

Until we agree that our problems in this country have a moral basis and source, we can never adequately address the particulars. Politicians will speak of rights, of dialogue, of the need to work together to reduce the necessity for abortion, without truly acknowledging the root of the problem. When the true fruit of marriage, its procreative aspect, was separated from the institution of marriage, it was only a matter of time before the deleterious effects of that separation would be felt. And indeed they have been.

Why, indeed, must we look at misery? The answer is due to our own sin and brokenness as people. When we turn away from the good, the true and the beautiful, our vision is clouded, our consciences dulled. Certainly, the moral confusion in our society has led many people to make immoral decisions without fully comprehending what they are doing. This is not an excuse, but I do think in some respects it is a partial explanation.

We must not remain silent on the life issues. Granted, some of the issues are more complex than others. When a family makes a difficult medical decision regarding life support, we do not automatically deem that to be euthanasia, and for obvious reasons. There are legitimate issues about ordinary vs. extraordinary means of life support and the Church offers guidance with these questions.

However, on the fundamental issue of the protection of innocent unborn human life, let there be no doubt whatsoever about the conviction of the Church. We cannot afford to allow any free passes to those who speak in vague, if even in seemingly convincing terms, about human rights or not forcing one's views on another, or about respecting choices even when we disagree. We must pray for the grace to witness courageously to the sanctity of human life even as we seek to be a church that communicates God's love and mercy. Both sides of this coin must be kept in balance- courage and mercy.

Here at the Cathedral, we have a design that is repeated all throughout the church along the walls. They are waves that are carved into the wall. They represent that life is a journey, not unlike a voyage on the seas. We are all riding in a boat, the Barque of Peter, the Church. The surging waves that surround us threaten to capsize our ship, the winds buffet the ship and the waves crash. We take refuge in the ship of the Church, one reason why we call the center of the church a nave.

The ship is an ancient Christian symbol. It represented the Church tossed on the sea of disbelief, worldliness, and persecution but finally reaching safe harbor with its cargo of human souls- that' you and me. We are the most precious cargo on the ship of the Church, and God wants to guide us safely into the harbor. There is no more precious cargo than our children, than those most innocent and in need of our protection. Who is more innocent than an unborn child in the womb?

In such a rapidly changing world, indeed we ought to “think about these things,” we ought to hold close our heart “whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious.” That is certainly more productive than thinking about all the bad things! We must remain people of hope-and at the same time, as Saint Paul exhorts his readers, we must “keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.”

Saint Paul is urging us to hold steady to the course. Do not veer off course- do not lose hope in the struggle to bring to light the need to witness to life. We cannot shirk our responsibility to witness to the sanctity of human life, even when others may not want to hear it, and we must do so in truth, with sincerity and in charity.

In these most challenging times, may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and strengthen our resolve to work for the sanctity of all human life.