

LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE

Life and dignity of the human person

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Second in a series

"When we speak of mankind, we must never forget the various attacks on the sacredness of human life. The plague of abortion is an attack on life. Allowing our brothers and sisters to die on boats in the Strait of Sicily is an attack on life. Dying on the job because the minimum safety standards are not respected is an attack on life. Death from malnutrition is an attack on life. Terrorism, war, violence; so is euthanasia. Loving life means always taking care of the other, wanting the best for him, cultivating and respecting her transcendent dignity." —

Pope Francis, Address to Meeting of the Science and Life Association

These words of Pope Francis points to the foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching: the dignity and sacredness of all human life. It is this belief that provides the foundation of a moral vision for human society; rooted in Sacred Scripture which proclaims that "God created man and woman in His image, in the divine image He created them" (see *Genesis 1:26-31*).

This fundamental value underpins all the other themes found in Catholic teaching concerning the human family.

It is also an invitation for you and me to become more conscious of our very dignity and giftedness as a child of God. Such recognition challenges oneself to be the best one can be and not cop out with the excuse, "I am only human!"

This phrase is an actual attestation of who we really are and challenges the human person to live as one created in the image and likeness of God and not settle for less!

Furthermore, it provides us with the litmus

Lord,
make me an instrument
of your peace;
where there is hatred,
let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness,
joy.
- St. Francis of Assisi

test of how we are to treat one another. If we truly recognize the worth of human life, how does it change how we treat "one's neighbor" in our daily encounters and interactions? What does it say to our interactions at home, in the workplace, at school, in the parish or even in traffic?

As Church, we believe that the measure of any institution or society is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. Inherent in this principle is the call for human society and its governments to protect the right to life of all human persons from con-

ception to natural death.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops state that: "In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means."

The breadth of this statement helps one to see the how this basic principle intersects with the various aspects of the human person as a social being: solidarity, dignity of work, family, rights and responsibilities, etc. What you and I stand for and do or don't do in life has an impact.

To pray: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace..." and to recognize the inherent dignity and co-responsibility behind these words is what we are being asked to consider this Lent as a Diocesan Church family.

Lent is a time of self-examination in preparation for our renewal of the baptismal covenant at Easter where we celebrate our giftedness in the Risen Lord.

This week let us take time to contemplate that giftedness by reflecting on the following questions:

- Do I respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception through natural death and everything in between?
- Do I recognize the face of Christ reflected in all others around me whatever their race, class, age, or abilities?
- Do I work to protect the dignity of others when it is being threatened?
- Am I committed to both protecting human life and to ensuring that every human being is able to live in dignity?



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