

- This weekend marks the beginning of "*Respect Life Month*" in the Church.
- **Since 1972**, the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* has designated the month of October to be the month we place a special focus on the ***dignity*** of all human life.
- It does not matter our *condition* in life, the *creed* of our religion, or the *color* of our skin—**ALL** *human life has dignity!*
- As Catholics, we respect human life from its *conception* to *natural death*,

whether it's an *elderly person* on their death bed,
a *criminal* behind bars or an *embryo* in the womb...
- It does not matter **HOW** that embryo was conceived in the womb—whether through *rape*, *incest*, or *unwanted pregnancy*,
 - the fact remains, according to the *American College of Pediatricians*, *human life* begins at the *moment* of conception!¹

¹ Source: <https://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/life-issues/when-human-life-begins>. Also, <http://www.abortionno.org/abortion-facts/>

- And that tiny human life has just as many *God-given rights* as you and I. In fact, it should have more since it cannot defend itself!
- Laws are supposed to *protect the innocent, not kill them*.
 - You cannot get any more *innocent* or *defenseless* than a baby in the womb of its mother.
- Before *Rowe vs. Wade* in 1973, there were laws to protect those who could not protect themselves.
- If America claims to be a "defender of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" why did our *Supreme Court* allow this to change?...
- The *theme* for this year's *Respect Life Month* is "**Moved by Mercy.**"
- The Church wants people to know that if we have helped end the life of another human being—no matter their situation or ours,
 - God wants us to heal us from *remorse* and *regret* of ending that life.

- **When it comes** to understanding the DIGNITY of life, it helps to understand the value of life through God's eye's.
- The world tells us that if we are *not yet born*, have a *disease*, have grown *too old*, or are *unattractive* by society's standards,
 - then our life is not worth *living*, or *protecting*.
- This is the same mind-set the *Nazi's*, the *Communists* and countless *terrorist groups* have had over the centuries—
 - and even our own Government when we once said that "slavery" was okay...
- However, God and the Catholic Church tells us that **ALL** *human life*—
 - no matter how *disordered*, *deformed*, *poor*, *uneducated*, or *repulsive* to society's standards— is still ***precious*** in the eyes of God!
- Why? Because every human being is given a *Soul* made in the image and likeness of God—which means we have the capacity to *know* and *love* our Creator. (Genesis 1:27)

- *Apes, dolphins, elephants, pigs, dogs, squirrels, crows, rats and octopuses*—are ranked as some of the most *intelligent* creatures on earth.
 - And "YES," I said, "octopuses." In every GOOGLE search I did on this topic *octopuses* were listed!
- Yet none of them, **NONE** of them, have ever built an *altar*, drawn an *image* or created a *ritual*, to honor and worship their Creator!
- God chose **us**—You and Me—to have the capacity to explore the *Mind of God* and then reflect His abilities and greatness by what we can know and create.
- **Respecting Life** does not only mean *respecting* the life of another, it means respecting our *OWN LIFE* as well.
- We live in a culture where the human body is constantly depicted as an object of *sexual pleasure*, an object of *violence* or an object of *disdain* and *loathing*.
- This "*disordered image*" of human life deteriorates and suffocates the *dignity* and *respect* bestowed on every person who was "wonderfully made in their mother's womb" by God... (Ps 139:13-14).

- **Respecting Life** also means respecting the *self-esteem* of others by being mature enough to say "I'm sorry for hurting you," or "I forgive you."
- This is the message that Jesus is trying to get through to his Apostles in today's Gospel. (Lk 17:5-10)
- In order to really understand today's Reading, we have to look at the *preceding* verses which say:
 - "Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he *repents*, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, "I repent," you must forgive him..." (vs 3-4)
- When the Apostles ask Jesus to help them "**increase their faith...**" they are asking for Jesus to help them understand how they could *continually forgive* someone who continually sins against them.
- This is when Jesus tells the Apostles:
 - "If you had faith the size of a *mustard seed*, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you."

- The type of "*faith*" Jesus is referring to here, is not that the Apostles *believe* in God—they already do.
- The type of "*faith*" Jesus is referring to has more to do with seeking his *GRACE* to help them do what they feel they can't do themselves.
- He is saying, "I know you're not strong enough to do what I am instructing you to do, but if you come to me and ask me to help you—if you have just a *little faith* in me—
 - I will give you the *Graces* to forgive the person who has wronged you time and time again...
- The mulberry tree would have been one of the largest trees in all of Israel.
- The roots of this kind of tree were thought to be extraordinarily strong; it was thought that this tree could stay rooted for hundreds of years.
- We may have *unforgiveness* and *bitterness* in our hearts that that is also deeply rooted,
 - but through our *faith in Christ*, he will help us dig down deep and rip out those roots of "*unforgiveness*."

- At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus says that even after you have forgiven someone repeatedly, don't expect me to jump up and down and say, "*Thank you, thank you, thank you!*"
- Your forgiveness is its *own reward* because if you do not forgive someone, then you are the one who is really suffering due to the "hardness" it creates in your heart.
- That "hardness," is the *tension* and *disharmony* we feel in our heart by not forgiving someone.
- Jesus wants to **FREE** us of this *inner-tension* and restore *inner-peace* through our *never-ending* forgiveness of others.
- Btw, we expect GOD to forgive us each and every time we ask for His forgiveness. If we want to be considered a *true child* of God, He expects us to do the same!
- Treating each other with the same kind of *Dignity* and *Forgiveness* that we expect from God is all part of having *Respect for Life*.
- It's not just about sustaining and preserving our *PHYSICAL* life, but our *Spiritual life* as well—and the *Spiritual life* of others.

- In our *2nd Reading* today, St. Paul says to Timothy:
 - "I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have... for God did not give us a *Spirit* of cowardice, but rather the *power* and *love* of *self-control*... with the *strength* that comes from God. (1 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14)
- Again... God knows we are not spiritually strong enough at times to tell someone, "*I forgive you*" or "*I am sorry I hurt you*"—but the ***Holy Spirit*** is.
- This is why we must always remember to turn to Him and ask Him to do what ***we*** cannot do for ourselves...