

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the Gospel today, Jesus takes a child – the smallest one, the weakest one, the one completely dependent on others, the most vulnerable one, the innocent one – and, putting his arms around it, He places the child in their midst as an example. When we look at children, we see in them a weakness (even if from a young age some of them are pretty stubborn! Yes, moms, you know which of your children I'm talking about), a dependence on others. There is no shame in that. While over the years we grow and can take care of ourselves better, sometimes we do the disservice to ourselves to think that we really are independent. We still need God.

The response to the Psalm today is "**The Lord upholds my life**" (Psalm 54). This is the truth: we exist only because God constantly upholds our lives. To put it another way, every breath we take is only because God wills us into existence at this moment; every cell lives, every atom in our bodies is moving because God wills it into existence. But the beautiful thing about our Faith is that we don't believe that God wants us to exist as some sort of experiment (God creates us and then watches to see what will happen), but rather He created us because *He loves us*. Think about this: God created *you* in love, so that you could love Him and be loved by Him forever. Period. This means that God doesn't just *will* you into existence at this moment, He *loves* you into existence in this moment.

You are loved!

Proof of this is that *you exist right now*. If God stopped loving you for even an instant, you would cease to exist. Note, I didn't say you would die... we still exist after death. No, you would just cease to be. In those times when you feel worthless, "less than," unloved or unlovable, cling to this truth that you are loved right now.

Look at this from another perspective: If God created us like a watchmaker who winds it up and sets it going, we could believe that God may have loved us into being, but that He may not love us as we are right now. He may be disgusted by us, but waiting for us to become the "perfect" version of ourselves so He can love us again. But (and this is a BIG but) because God loves us into existence in *each and every moment* we know that He loves us **as we are right now**. He is NOT disgusted with us, but delights in us, rejoices in our being. Please note that this doesn't mean that God loves and approves of everything we *do* – our actions can kill our souls and our relationship with God – but at no point does *He* stop loving us. In fact God loves us so much, He does not want to leave us where we are, since He longs for us to have *life*!

One other point to ponder about God loving us into existence: He chose to use humans to participate in the making of other humans... He didn't have to; He wanted to. And the way that God chose for us to come into existence is through an act which is the sign of the deep love between a man and a woman in a bond of committed love – to show us in a concrete way that we are loved into existence. (I recognize that because of fallen human nature, not every sexual act is open to the creation of a new, beloved, unrepeatable person who will live forever, nor is every person created in an act of love, but can you see why this is the plan God has for sex, marriage and our existence?)

So "**The Lord upholds my life**." We are loved into existence, and that existence is constantly upheld by the love of God. At least two things follow from this: 1) we are dependent on God. To put it another way, we don't create our own existence, and we can't make us continue to exist or cease to exist (even if we can take our lives, we exist beyond the grave, either in eternal life, or eternal death [hell]). We need God. Just like that small child who knows it needs Mom and Dad, we have to recognize that we need God. If we live under the illusion that we are completely independent and self-sufficient, we will find out just how weak we really are.

This brings us to the second point: 2) God is not some secondary part of our lives – He is central. Our culture says we can worship (or not) as we want, but that it is akin to an activity, a hobby, "icing on the cake." Our religion, our relationship with God, though, is not secondary, but primary – it is the central activity of our life, it is the meat and potatoes of the meal (not the dessert)! When we die, we will come before God, and we will not be asked if we played football or Tetris, we will not be asked if we were a brain surgeon or a sanitation engineer, we will be asked if we have come into relationship with our Lord and God. This is what matters. How we live our lives – every aspect of our lives – in relationship to God, is the measure of the success or failure of our lives.

May we truly recognize that "**The Lord upholds my life**" and learn to depend on God in everything, recognizing His great love for us.