

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Gospel this weekend ends with the beautiful story of Jesus calling the children to Himself. The disciples are upset that Jesus is being asked to spend His time and energy with these little ones. But we know Jesus, don't we? He loves the little ones, the most vulnerable, the ones who are last, the ones who are rejected by others. In fact, He shows us how close He is to those who are rejected by allowing Himself to be rejected, abandoned, betrayed and killed. He loves the littles ones.

This weekend is Respect Life Sunday. We recall in this how Almighty God calls us to respect the sacred dignity of each person. In our modern American culture, it is easy to fall into the trap of **utilitarianism**. Now, don't let this big word scare you away. Utilitarianism means that we base something's (or someone's) value and dignity on its utility, on what it produces, on how *useful* it is. The problem with doing this with people is that God has created each person with inalienable dignity, whether he or she can produce anything at all. This is the gift of God – that we are precious NOT because of how smart we are, or how productive, or how good, or how talented, but **because we are loved by God**.

The trap of utilitarianism is that we start looking at other people – or even ourselves – as having dignity only if we can do something good for society, if we are *useful*. If we use others for our own selfish, sexual pleasure – in person, in pictures, in movies, in our own minds – we degrade their sacred personhood. If we look at someone who is mentally ill and unable to hold a job, do we see a “bum” or do we see someone precious to Jesus, about whom He says, “Let the children come to me”? When we see someone with Alzheimer's, do we look on them as someone who is “lost,” or do we see the gift that God has given us in this beautiful person.

Maybe you are getting older (who isn't?!) and you are beginning to recognize that your body is not functioning as it once was able to – do you see yourself as a “burden on society” (or at least a burden on your family), or do you recognize your own dignity which cannot be taken away even if your bodily functions are? Do you see that you can become a conduit of grace for others to grow in love and service (and so to become more like Jesus Christ), and that your circumstances can help you to grow in dependence on God?

When we look at children (that Jesus says to let them come to Him), do we see children as commodities or as people. Our culture has shifted somewhat in looking at children as “*wanted*” as opposed to “*accepted from God*”. While this may seem like a subtle shift, it has huge consequences. When we accept children lovingly from God, we recognize that our **children are NOT ours**, but rather we are given the gift of stewardship over them for a period of time. This helps to cultivate the attitude that we are to do our best to give them to God, to help them come into relationship with Him, to help them to grow up to be LOVING, not just *productive*, people. When we look the culture of “*wanting*” children, we begin to see children as something owed to us (so when we have fertility issues, instead of acting morally, we will do anything to get that child... which may include even *freezing our children*, as embryos). And worse, when children are NOT wanted, we end up killing them (through abortion), or doing destructive scientific testing on them (such as with embryonic stem cell research). These are our babies – people, like us, who were made in the image and likeness of God, who have an inalienable dignity given by God – and we treat them as our property.

Our culture teaches us to *use* people, not to see in them the sacred dignity given by God. Jesus shows us in the Gospel today that each person is precious to Him. We as a people and as individuals need to repent of how we have not respected the dignity of each human life, from conception to natural death. The beautiful thing is that God is always ready – waiting and eager, even – to forgive us our sins, and to give us the grace to start over. There is no sin too big for Him not to forgive. He rejoices to give us MERCY! Let us fly to Him for that great gift of mercy.

If you would like to join me building up the culture of life through peaceful witness and prayer, there are several opportunities. One is the March for Life in Washington, DC in January. There is more information elsewhere in the bulletin, or you can come and speak with me about your interest. May God continue to bless you greatly!