

27th Ordinary Time Year “A”/ Respect Life Sunday
October 7-8, 2017 (515p, 12:00 Noon, 5:0 p.m.)
Readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7; Phil 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43

October is Respect Life month, an annual observance that seeks to educate Catholics about the crucial duty we all possess to faithfully articulate respect for human life in all its stages. The theme chosen for this year’s Respect Life Program is *Be Not Afraid*. Jesus’ warning about the vineyard is especially poignant today, when our culture and sometimes our government promote values inimical to the happiness and true good of individuals and society.

Our 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.

Thus, the proverbial “\$64,000 Question” –who ruined the vineyard? Isaiah wonders as much in the first reading. Hear the outcry. Can we hear the outcry anymore, the outcry of the unborn? **We must not remain silent on the full range of life issues.** This takes resolve.

Wild grapes are the fruits of a corrupt nature. Where grace does not dwell, corruption will. But the wickedness of those who 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 and unless we agree that our societal problems have a moral basis and source, we can never adequately address the particulars. When the true fruit of marriage, its generative 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.

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 becomes clouded, our consciences dulled. Moral confusion leads many to make immoral decisions without fully comprehending what they are doing. This is not an excuse, but in some respects, it is a partial explanation.

As Cardinal Dolan, Chair of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, wrote in this year's Respect Life Statement:

As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that our identity and our mission are two sides of the same coin; like the apostles, we are called to be missionary disciples. We are not only invited to follow and take refuge in God, our stronghold, but we are also commissioned to reach out to one another, especially to the weak and vulnerable.

On the fundamental issue of the protection of innocent human life, there is no doubt whatsoever about the conviction of the Church. We cannot be taken in by those who speak in vague, if even eloquent terms, about human rights or about not forcing one's views on another. When we allow for that logic to hold sway, the crack in the wall soon becomes a chasm. People become emboldened and realize that the Church is not strong enough to resist their popular view stating, "I am personally opposed, but..."

The Median age of Americans is now just under thirty-eight. Thus, 59% of all living Americans were born after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. They have never lived in a country without legalized abortion.¹ This must factor into a coherent strategy to change minds and hearts.

¹ See www.statista.com I also learned that 73% of Americans are younger than me!

This is at least partly why, the Church has consistently spoken about the sanctity of the unborn, while teaching all the life issues, and paying particular attention to helping women who face difficult decisions while pregnant, and helping to heal those who have in fact had abortions and who need love, forgiveness and healing.

It is not enough merely to teach about morality, important as that is. We must also reach out, and I am proud to say that the Church has been doing that consistently since 1973, most especially with dedicated laity who volunteer in life care centers, supporting programs that do everything possible so that women do not feel as though they have no alternatives to abortion.

The failure to protect life in the womb negates two of our most fundamental moral imperatives: respect for innocent life, and preferential concern for the weak and defenseless.² I always welcome the send-off Mass for those traveling to Washington DC for the March for Life in January. The power of a young people witnessing to their pro-life convictions in public—this is tremendous.

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.

² “No Catholic can responsibly take a ‘pro-choice’ stand when the ‘choice’ in question involves the taking of innocent human life.” USCCB Nov.1989.