

Respect Life Sunday Homily
October 5, 2008

Hope and Trust in Life. That is the theme of Respect Life events this year. Hope and Trust in Life. The expressed need to be hopeful and trusting suggests that something is amiss, not right. Yet to be hopeful and trusting also suggests that it can become right. To hope is to anticipate, look forward to, to dream. To trust is to have faith that it can, that it will happen.

If you look around this Cathedral you can see the paint peeling. You also can see that blocked off area behind which is hiding scaffolding where restoration is beginning. That ugly area gives us hope. We can trust that this beautiful space will even more powerfully lift our hearts and minds to God. In the meantime we live amidst the peeling paint of the present.

In a way our present culture needs restoration. It too is deteriorating before our eyes, with violence, greed and loneliness epidemic. It needs more than a new coat of paint on the surface. It needs a conversion of heart. What is amiss, what is not right? God is missing. Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States last spring. In his talk to the Bishops he defined it well: He spoke of a uniquely American brand of secularism which he said results in "a growing separation of faith from life: living 'as if God did not exist.'" This is aggravated by an individualistic and eclectic approach to faith and religion: far from a Catholic approach to 'thinking with the Church,' each person believes he or she has a right to pick and choose, maintaining external social bonds without an integral, interior conversion to the law of Christ. Consequently, rather than being transformed and renewed in mind, Christians are easily tempted to conform themselves to the spirit of this age, we have seen this emerge in an acute way in the scandal given by Catholics who promote an alleged right to abortion."

The gift of freedom which once carried with it responsibilities, has become a false god that suggests anything goes. What is amiss is that God is placed off to the side. His absence is reflected in the insensitivity about and to one another, beginning with the unborn not allowed to live as God intended, carrying through to those in their senior years thrust aside as of not worthy, though always worthy in the eyes of God.

Both the first reading from Isaiah and the Gospel reading from Matthew describe vineyards. Both passages warn of the surety that judgment will come based on whether we have been good stewards of God's gifts. In the Gospel the landowner gave his vineyard into the care of tenants expecting them to fulfill their responsibilities to care for it and share its fruits. It became a culture of death with the landowner's servants beaten, stoned and killed. They will certainly respect my son, the landowner thought. He too they killed. The culture of death does not respect anyone except oneself.

We can subtly be drawn into that mentality. Therefore it is important that we understand what the Church teaches and why. All life is sacred from conception to natural death. To take innocent life is a grave evil. In election years we are called to inform our consciences to guide how we vote. I encourage you to go to the diocesan website for resources to do so and read the Bishops Bulletin. Most important is to vote to allow God's will be done beginning with the unborn. In reality we need to continually

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inform our consciences to guide us every day because each day we are personally confronted with this culture amiss which can lure us into its attractive but shallow and destructive abyss.

There is so much hurting which could be avoided by keeping God at the center. We are called to Respect Life by reaching out to those hurting. These include caring about mothers and fathers who experience trauma and health issues after abortions and those who become addicted to pornography or unhealthy behaviors that see others as objects to use or abuse. The list is long; you know them from family life.

Our diocese through Catholic Family Services, Catholic Charities, the Family Life Office and the Pro-Life Office have programs and counseling to help in these and other areas supported by your CFSA contributions. Encourage those hurting to take advantage of the Mother Teresa Fund which assists pregnant mothers, the St. Raphael Fund which assists those in the military and their families, Project Rachael which assists after abortions, crisis pregnancy counseling and adoption assistance.

Through these programs and personal acts of kindness we express our hope and trust in life. Yet it is easy to get discouraged; are we doing any good? However there are signs of hope all around us. You parish respect life representatives, you birth parents and adoptive families, you O’Gorman pro-life students, give us hope. One great source of hope is prayer which can work miracles. The Blessed Mother, Star of Hope, encourages us.

Amy, only 40, was brought to an emergency room with both lungs collapsed. She was in a coma. Days went by in intensive care and no response from her, hope was weakening. Words like brain dead and persistent vegetative state were spoken. Amy’s mother however would not give up. She prayed constantly and quietly, as did others including many on the hospital staff. A housekeeper said as she stood at the door of Amy’s room praying for her, she saw an angel at Amy’s bedside. Another staffer while praying was overcome with a feeling of assurance that Amy was going to be all right.

One day Amy’s mother felt how cold Amy’s legs were. She massaged them while praying a mother’s prayer, take my warmth, take my life. Then she cradled Amy into her arms and prayed again. At that moment Amy’s sister walked into the room and Amy woke up. She said that she had gone a little distance away. Where were you, Amy? Her sister asked. She said she had gone to meet their grandmother who had died several years before. She recounted her experience: Why are you here, Amy, her grandmother asked her. Amy told her I have come to get my candle. Her grandmother replied, it is not yet time. Then Amy said, Grandmother took me by the hand and led me to the Virgin Mary. Mary said I was safe now and led me back here. The medical personnel who told this story, commented, prayer and care healed our patient. Prayer and care can sustain us and lift us. The Blessed Mother models hope and trust. She walks with us. (From Sacred Stories, Catholic Health Initiatives, Eighth Edition)

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St. Paul in the second reading summarizes our task: whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you. What is worthy of praise is God the Father, giver of life; God the Son, Redeemer of the World, and God the Holy Spirit, Guide and Comforter. When we proclaim that truth even in a culture that does not believe, we will have hope and trust in life. And the God of Peace will be with us. Give Praise to the Lord for all life including yours.