



Respect Life Sunday Homily
October 3, 2010
Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
St Joseph Cathedral

“How long, O Lord, I cry for help but you do not listen. I cry out, violence, but you do not intervene.” Those words of the prophet Habakkuk in our first reading resonate with us as we look at the chaotic world in which we must live. They especially ring true on this Respect Life Sunday, the annual focus of the Church in the United States on the sanctity of all human life from natural conception to natural death, and the threats to human life. The disciples cried out to Jesus in the Gospel reading, “increase our faith.” Those too are words we may proclaim when despite prayer and protest we sadly acknowledge the ever widening violence of one against another.

All issues of respect for life return to the core tension, the common good or me first, God’s way or mine. You have heard this before, but there is a Peanuts cartoon in which Linus is reading a book and comments to his sister Lucy, “It says here that the world revolves around the sun once a year.” Lucy responds, “the world revolves around the sun? Are you sure? I thought it revolved around me.” Lucy speaks for our secular culture, too often manifested in the breakdown of family life, in unethical business practices, and in the exploitation of others for personal pleasure or economic advantage. As Christians our world revolves around God’s son and our choices ought to reflect that. In Christ is our hope and our strength.

A scandal of our day is how isolated we have become from one another, reinforced by technology that separates. Unborn babies are classified as problems or wanted or not based on timing, gender or condition; human embryos are seen as simply material for experimentation or the waste dump; those through aging, illness or accident who have lost part of their physical or mental prowess are viewed as economic drains and therefore without value. Each of us was an embryo, each of us rested in the womb of our mothers; each of us faces aging, illness and accident. Respecting life is not just a political discussion, it hits home.

Jesus responded to the disciples, if only you had the faith of a mustard seed you could work miracles. A mustard seed is not very big yet it symbolizes what can grow from faith lived well, from trusting in God’s will and God’s way and with the confidence that ultimately justice will be done and truth will prevail. To do so requires us to be people of hope, and our hope is in the name of the Lord.

What did the disciples mean when they pleaded for an increase in faith? Perhaps they sought a greater ability to integrate and live out the teachings of Christ with hope. Living the Gospel of Life is tough and often not popular, yet it is fulfilling and freeing because it is true to who God created us to be.

The responsibility of each of us as committed Catholics is not merely to complain and wring our hands. We are called to stand up for truth and allow ourselves to be God’s instruments to those whose lives we can touch. The theme for this year’s Respect Life Sunday is “The measure of love is to love without measure.” Christian faith is a gift we have been given. When we truly accept Christ as Our Lord

and Savior we can do nothing less than share that good news, always with charity and tolerance, but we must never be ashamed of or compromise the gift of life given us and seek to defend the opportunity of that gift for others, especially those who cannot defend themselves, the unborn and the vulnerable. This means that we are to actively care about and care for members of our families, our friends, our co-workers and those most vulnerable whether we know them or not. They are brothers and sisters in Christ.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities has recently issued some brief pamphlets that encourage those facing especially hard personal choices that threaten respect for life. The titles include: *Caring for Each Other Even unto Death*, focusing on end of life issues including assisted nutrition and hydration; *Hope for Married Couples Who Want to Have a Child*, focusing on morally sound ways to treat infertility and to support such couples facing that reality; *Divine Mercy and the Death Penalty*, focusing on assuring a safe society without using violence to fight violence; *Sex Trafficking, the New Slavery*, focusing on the rampant ugly abuse of children and young women; *Make Room for People*, focusing on the disingenuous demand for population control using immoral means; *Losing a Child to Suicide, Trusting in God's Mercy*, focusing on the certainty of God's grace to heal so deep a wound, the loss of one's child; and, *The Promise of Pro-Life Youth*, focusing on what students can do to stand up for life in the midst of cultural disdain in educational institutions.

We know in faith that every life is a gift, an awesome gift from God. Our faith is rooted in the sacredness of that gift. Every human being, each woman and man with all our differences, is created equal in the image and likeness of God. That awesome truth is to be reflected in our actions and in society's institutions and laws. But laws are not the ultimate answer. As we have recently experienced laws can be changed, ignored or circumvented. Only the conversion of hearts one at a time will be lasting. Respect Life Sunday is a call for conversion for others, but for us as well.

How can we live out what we believe? We can every day and in all ways respect one another as brothers and sisters even those we have a hard time liking. We can honor marriage as instituted by God between one man and one woman. We can encourage chastity and respect for the gift of sexuality. We can be open to the gift of children and support those who are. We can work to assure moral standards are taught in our schools and ethical practices are employed by those we do business with. We can live every day what we proclaim on Sunday. We can welcome persons with disabilities, support adequate services for the mentally ill, honor and aid the aged and infirm until natural death. We can speak out in the public square for life issues, and vote our informed conscience. And of course, we can pray without ceasing and call on Mary, the mother of life, to intercede on behalf of us all.

Our faith may seem inadequate, what we can do to encourage respect for life many seem meager, the size of a mustard seed, but each of us in our own ways can be instruments of Christ's love. The Lord responded to the entreaty of Habakkuk with the reassurance: the vision still has its time and will not disappoint. The one who does not disappoint has come, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is with us today in the Holy Eucharist. He walks with us and gives us all that we need to be people of life and therefore people of hope. Proclaiming the Gospel of Life is hard and can be discouraging yet as St. Paul said in the 2nd reading encourages: "bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God."

This day let us reaffirm our respect for life by showing the measure of our love by loving without measure, loving one another as Christ has loved us.