



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO
Office of the Bishop

A Reflection on the Sanctity of Human Life

June 22, 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The highpoint of God's Creation---over and above the immense universe, including our planet Earth, with sun, moon and stars; the oceans and continents; animals and sea creatures; plants and other vegetation--- was the creation of the human person, "*made in the image and likeness of God*" (cf. *Gen. 1:26*). It was God's intention from the beginning of time that the human family would live in peace with one another, united in His love. But, from the moment that Original Sin entered into the world, God's original Plan was disrupted. Soon the human family began to experience violence toward one another, seen for the first time when Cain killed his brother Abel.

In our own day and time, that violence against one another has increased in intensity, and the divisions among us seem to have become deeper. Now, in anticipation of the United States Supreme Court's decision on the legality of abortion, I believe it is extremely important that we all pause to reflect on what is at the core of this case: the Sanctity of Human Life. This is not (nor should it be) a partisan political issue, but originates in God's intention in creating humanity. When the Church articulates the teaching of Jesus that all human life is sacred, we mean something much deeper and broader than the growing political and moral chasm between "pro-choice" and "pro-life" advocates.

Affirming the Sanctity of Human Life means so much more than outlawing abortions or deciding whether or not a woman has a right to choose. It is about the precious and greatest gift of human life, certainly at its most vulnerable and fragile stage, but also at *every* stage that it is

given by “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life” (cf. Nicene Creed): from the moment of conception to the experience of natural death. Affirming the Sanctity of Human Life also includes doing so in the full range of “life issues”, including capital punishment, racism, domestic violence, immigration, economic disparity, rioting and destructive activities in our city streets, to name but a few. This affirmation must not be reduced to simple political sound bites and obscured into legal arguments over the legality of abortion or a right to “choose”.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Mt 7:12), Jesus summarizes His moral teaching in the simplest and most basic terms: “*Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.*” We call this the *Golden Rule* because it expresses everything we need to know about social interaction. As a result, it establishes a basic principle to use in assessing our current attitudes toward life issues. How would we want to be treated? Who would have wanted our mother to choose to end our life in the womb? Who of us want to be killed by those who find us “unwanted”? Who would want any of us to be pushed to the sidelines or devalued just because our mental capacity or our physical abilities are somehow limited? Who would want to be hated, distrusted, or treated as second-rate because our skin color, ethnic heritage, or racial background is not the same as the majority of those around us? Who would want to be seen as burdensome or disposable just because we are less useful due to age?

If we follow the *Golden Rule* and treat everyone the way we ourselves would like to be treated, we will be observing the barest and most minimal criterion on how to treat others: with the exact same dignity, respect and rights as we would expect, and indeed desire, to be shown. It is, of course, critically important to remember that Jesus expects much more from us, who are His disciples and members of His Body, the Church. If we want to live as Jesus calls us to live, we cannot- and should not- be satisfied with the minimal approach. On the contrary, we must strive for the ideal that Jesus gives us *to love one another as He loves us*: to not just value, respect, and be nice to others because that is how we expect to be treated. Rather, we are called to bear witness boldly in loving with Christ’s love and no other, because there is no other genuine love. As those redeemed by His Blood, Jesus calls us to love others as much as we love God, and love ourselves, because we recognize that every person is made in the image and likeness of God, and is, therefore, deserving of the greatest dignity and respect.

Every human life is sacred to God. Jesus’ coming as man in the Incarnation and sharing in our human nature, and His Suffering, Death and Resurrection, attest without question to this factual reality of our existence. Every person is a Child of God and possesses incomparable dignity and worth because Almighty God has given it to each human person, not a value granted by or

determined by a humanity that struggles with its own sins. Regardless of who we are, our state in life, our race, religion or cultural heritage, our background, our age or social status, the state of our health (physical, emotional or mental), our accomplishments, or our personal gifts and talents, ***every individual human being is precious in the sight of God*** and, therefore, should also be valued in the eyes of his or her fellow human beings, and treated with dignity and respect that our common humanity requires.

No one is unwanted by God. His Love is universally inclusive. Every human being is wanted by God, because every single person has been given the gift of life. This gift is a share in God's own Being that is more precious than anything we can possibly imagine. Life itself is the treasure given to us by God to be nurtured and protected and shared generously with others. Nothing on earth is more valuable than human life. That is why deliberately taking a human life by murder, abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, or any other means is a grave sin---an offense against God and the human family. God alone gives life; God alone is able to know when it is to end.

No one is unwanted by God. That is why we reverence and love all life and every human person as our brother and sister; why we, as Jesus' followers and members of His Catholic Church, seek with everything we have to bear witness to His love in assisting those in need, in helping the disabled, in caring for the infirmed and the elderly, in encouraging and providing for women with unexpected pregnancies, and in speaking out forcefully against all attempts to treat society's "unwanted" human beings as somehow less valuable than they truly are in the sight of God. No one is unwanted in God's family. We may not always show it as clearly as we should, but all are welcome. All are valued. All are called to be members of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Every human life is sacred and loved—especially those who feel unwanted or who have been rejected by unjust, unloving and inhuman laws, policies and social practices in this and every other age. Every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can come to recognize the sacred value of human life, from the first moment of conception until life's natural end. The Church affirms the God-given right of every human being to have this ultimate "good" respected no matter what.

No one should ever have to wonder: "Does God really want me?" There is no doubt that God wants everyone and wills them to exist. That means God wants you and me, and every human being who has ever lived, and every person yet to be conceived by Him and to share in His life.

Right after teaching the “Golden Rule”, Jesus warns us that His way can be difficult. “*Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.*” (Mt. 7:13ff.) We have seen very clear evidence of those choosing the “easy way”, the convenient path, and choices of or purely personal preference, all the while ignoring Jesus’ warning, and ignoring even the most basic criterion of goodness such as “the Golden Rule”.

Yet, the fact remains: every human life is sacred. Every human person is a soul intended and made by God to one day share eternal life with Him forever. Let us pray that our human-made laws will at least reflect and uphold the Golden Rule; that we will heed God’s Law and never kill a fellow human being at any stage of life—from the moment of conception to the experience of natural death; that we will continue striving to follow Jesus’ Great Commandment to *love one another as Jesus loves us*. The Life and Love that Jesus gives us is the only credible and genuine way that we can stand up together for the value, the inherent dignity, and the Sanctity of all Human Life. Let us ask our Blessed Mother, who gave birth to the Lord of Life, and wants nothing more than to bring us all safely Home to Heaven, to help us do everything in our power to protect and defend all human life, especially the lives of our dear sisters and brothers who are most vulnerable and threatened.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Paul J. Bradley

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Bishop of Kalamazoo