

The Sanctity of Life and the Works of Pro-Life

Homily at the ***Mass for Life***,

by Most Rev. Richard Gagnon, Archbishop of Winnipeg (RC)

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During the *March For Life* last Thursday I found myself walking alongside a tall young man carrying a paper cup of coffee: He had joined the walk at some point. At first I thought he was one of those “sidewalk collectors” of coins in our pockets! However, I soon realised he was not and so I entered into a conversation with him. I thanked him for taking part in standing up against the taking of human life in our society. He replied very simply: “ *Well I’m definitely against that!*”. He then told me his story about his daughter. His girlfriend became pregnant and there was a strong pressure to abort the child. Everyone he knew wanted to do this. But he did not and he convinced his girlfriend to have the baby. Today he is so very proud of his eight year old daughter. His witness to life was not sophisticated but just a basic acknowledgement that all life is precious.

This brings to mind that there is a basic human logic behind the pro-life position. I have noticed over the years that when pro-choice people decide to crash a pro-life rally, there is no attempt to argue their position logically but rather to shout down the pro-life speakers. Now this happens often enough to lead one to believe that pro-choice advocates never talk about the totality of what one is choosing other than to use well-used slogans that have to do with perceived women’s rights. The same avoidance can be found with the politician or other leaders who state that he or she is personally against abortion yet doesn’t want to impose their view on others. I have yet to hear a good reason why they are personally against abortion or euthanasia etc. This is the situation we find ourselves in today – no serious discussion or at least not enough serious discussion in the public forum. If I may make the point that during our last federal election one would be hard pressed to recall the debates touching on the subject of abortion or physician assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Now there is a place for human logic in this question of human life, but for the Christian we must be more than logicians because ultimately our view of reality is one that is informed by faith and this is something we should never be ashamed of. We are witnesses to Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Faith itself, like Love, is a special source of knowledge that goes beyond the strictly empirical scientific method. There is a knowledge between two people who love each other and have committed their lives together and there is a knowledge associated with a faith-filled relationship with God through Jesus Christ that tells us that the killing of human life is wrong. Abortion is not wrong because the Church says that it is wrong- rather the Church says that it is wrong because it is wrong. This is something that the young man with the paper cup understood without having any connection to a faith community that I could perceive.

To be informed by faith means that we become aware of God’s hand in creation - it is not our creation, it belongs to the Creator. In the Acts 14, St. Paul says to the Jews in

Lystra: that for many years God allowed people to go their own way, yet he did not leave himself without a witness in doing good and he cites the witness of creation: “...giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy”. Nature teaches us about God! Pope Francis teaches this in **Laudato Si’**.

There are many leaders in society today who advocate for physician assisted suicide and euthanasia and yet also call themselves Christians –this causes great confusion among the faithful. They will say that their bodies are their own or will complain : *Whose body is it anyways?* In actual fact this position is not supportable by Scripture and so authentic Christian faith teaches the exact opposite. In St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans we hear: “*Now none of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master. While we live we are responsible to the Lord and when we die we are his servants. Both in life and in death we are the Lord’s. That is why Christ died and came to life again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living*” (Rom.14) And there are many other such references in both the Old and New Testaments- not to mention the very First Commandment: “*I am the Lord your God and you shall not have other God’s before me*”! We are not self-sufficient gods ruling over human life!

To be informed by faith means that a faith-filled relationship with God in Jesus Christ sees an inseparable link between the love of neighbour and love of God. Jesus teaches us in the Gospel: “*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me*”. Furthermore, such a way of life leads to a knowledge of God and his ways: “*Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them*”. Even doing works of goodness towards our neighbour regardless of whether one’s neighbour is in the womb or at the end of life, points towards the presence of God in this world of ours, as Jesus reminds us: “*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves*”(John 14).

By sharing in our March for Life, the young man with the coffee cup came into contact with people who know about the relationship between works and love of God. We gather tonight to pray for the growth in respect for human life and we must never give up on showing the face of love which is the face of Jesus even when there is anger and opposition. Pope Benedict said it best in **Deus Caritas Est**: “*Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God*”.

Let us continue to not only speak about the sanctity of life but also to do the works of pro-life!