Living the Gospel of Life

The Gospel of Life (from www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/)

In March 1995 Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, or The Gospel of Life. This document can only be fully understood in the wider context of Catholic social teaching (CST), part of a long tradition of moral reflection on social issues by the Catholic Church. The basic and unifying principle underlying this teaching is the innate dignity and worth of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God. In order to be fully human and to realize our potential as God’s creation, each of us has basic rights: to food, clothing, shelter, freedom of religion and conscience, democratic participation in the decisions that affect our lives, work at just wage, etc. But the right to life is the first and most fundamental right.

In his landmark document, The Gospel of Life, John Paul II fashions a response to new and increasing threats to human life and dignity in modern society, including hunger, poverty, malnutrition, war, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS. The Pope identifies a crisis of culture that is characterized by the growing social acceptability of practices that were once unanimously rejected and condemned as criminal, especially abortion, euthanasia, and embryo experimentation.

The Holy Father deplores widespread social conditioning that darkens human conscience so that it cannot distinguish between good and evil in relation to the fundamental right to life, and characterizes this trend as the emergence of a culture of death.

The Pope identifies also signs of the culture of life: these include families adopting children and providing loving care to the aged, shelters for pregnant women in crisis, drug treatment programs, AIDS relief centers, hospice care for terminally ill patients, programs for organ donation, domestic violence shelters, greater acceptance of nonviolence, opposition to the death penalty, and growing ecological consciousness.

John Paul II calls on all of us to proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Life: namely, that each and every human life is sacred and inviolable. This demands the adoption of a new lifestyle that makes practical choices on the basis of a renewed sense of values and priorities. We must learn to value people instead of things, to see other people as our brothers and sisters in Christ. John Paul II makes it clear that no single person or group is responsible for the defense and promotion of human life and dignity. These are everyone’s tasks and responsibilities.

Some of Catholic Teachings on Life Issues

Bringing a respect for human dignity to practical politics can be a daunting task. There is such a wide spectrum of issues involving the protection of human life and the promotion of human dignity.

Abortion: “The right to life does not depend, and must not be declared contingent on the pleasure of anyone else, not even a parent or a sovereign.” (Mother Teresa)

Capital Punishment: “The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life...A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil.” (Pope John Paul II)

Euthanasia: "...suffering, especially suffering in the last moments of life, has a special place in God’s saving plan, it is in fact a sharing in Christ’s passion and a union with the redeeming sacrifice which He offered in obedience to the Father's will." (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)

Embryonic stem cell research and human cloning: "No objective, even though noble in itself, such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings, or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, either inside or outside of the mother’s body." (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)
Face Our Culture with Christ  
By Shawn D. Carney Executive Director of the Coalition for Life in Bryan, www.coalitionforlife.com

Perhaps no chapter in Sacred Scripture receives so much attention from Christians while at the same time is avoided by so many than Mathew 25:31-46 or as it is often called, “The Judgment of the Nations”. Why?

Matthew 25 always seems to be direct, final, timeless, hopeful, and a little scary all at once. It serves as a bright light into what Christ wants out of us while on this earth and also as a warning to those who ignore that light.

Our Lord commands us to see Him in every single person and to love them as we would love Him. This is not always easy for us, but Christ reminds us of the stakes in the last two verses of what He is calling us to do, “Amen I say to you, whatever you unto the least of my brethren, you do unto me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Over 2000 years later the least of our brethren rests in the place that God chose to send His own Son, the womb of a woman. The place where Christ once dwelt in Mary is now one of the most dangerous places in America with nearly 4,000 lives taken every single day in the United States through abortion.

On January 22nd we will mourn the nearly 50 million babies killed and millions of women hurt as we approach the 35th anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion in America. God’s most precious children in the womb have been dehumanized and forgotten under words like ‘choice’, ‘privacy’, and ‘personal liberty’.

Every legal abortion ends the life of a completely unique human being with their own DNA, genetic code, and beating heart. Abortion is a modern day holocaust where many of us do everything possible to either downplay or ignore the reality of abortion. Abortion makes everyone, including myself, very uncomfortable because of what is at stake, life. I have witnessed Christians avoiding the issue by saying its “political” and politicians ignoring it saying its “religious”.

Despite the reaction of the world, this is a very exciting time to live as a Christian because our culture is in desperate need of Christ. It is not a time to be comfortable or arrogant or hesitant or depressed, but a time to be a saint. Christ doesn’t call us to wait on judges to defend the least of our brethren; He calls us now, for these are His children that are perishing. St. Paul tells us to have a zeal for souls, not a zeal for politics. While we must obviously vote pro-life, we must never lose the sense of urgency the abortion crisis presents.

Abortion is a sin with many victims including the baby, the couple, those who advise for the abortion, and those who do the abortion. We must pray for them but also go to where the pain is and bring the love of Jesus to those hurting as any missionary would do. We cannot write off our culture and live in a bubble; we must engage our culture as the saints did.

This Lent is the perfect time to trust Christ and stretch yourself to defend the least of our brethren in the womb. From Ash Wednesday to March 16 you can join 59 cities in 31 states for the 2nd nationally coordinated 40 Days for Life. During this holy season of prayer and penance, Christians will be taking the hope and love of Jesus to the sidewalks of abortion clinics for 40 days of prayer and fasting, peaceful vigil, and community outreach.

This peaceful and proven campaign has been successfully conducted in over 80 cities already and has saved hundreds of lives, given post-abortive women healing, and converted clinic workers. This campaign started in Aggieland in 2004 and is now a nationally coordinated event. In a time when so many are frustrated, angry, and feel helpless when it comes to abortion, 40 Days for Life is bringing the joy and love of Christ to clinics that offer death and hopelessness as a solution.

Join Christians, pastors, bishops, and priests from across America to grow closer to Christ and bring His love into the hearts and minds of our culture.

What can You Do?

- Stay well-informed on the issues, visit www.usccb.org/prolife /
- Respectfully discuss these issues with acquaintances and colleagues
- Volunteer for Pro-Life Committee or any Social Ministry at St. Mary’s (look in “Service” on www.aggiecatholic.org)
- Participate in Pro-Life events (see bulletin or website for details): Rosary of Life in Austin on Saturday, January 26; Brazos Valley Pro-Life Mass at St. Mary’s on Monday January 28, 2008, at 5:30 PM; the 40 Days for Life in the Bryan/College Station, from Wed. Feb. 6 to Sun. March 16 (see www.coalitionforlife.com for more information)
- Pray

Interested in social justice issues? Come and join the Social Ministry Commission for Movie Night to watch “Hotel Rwanda” on Friday, January 25, in room 201 of St. Mary’s Student Center.