

Father O'Connor's Homily for 6 October 2024
Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time-B
Respect Life Sunday
Weekend Three: Stewardship Commitment Sunday

Genesis 2: 18-24
Hebrews 2: 9-11
Mark 10: 2-16

Friday, October 4th, was the feast day of one of everybody's favorite saints, Francis of Assisi.

Saint Francis loved life and he revered all of God's creation. He would walk barefoot on the spring soil lest he crush any of the new life of nature. Francis would genuflect before an expectant mother, acknowledging the precious human life that she was carrying in the tabernacle of her womb. And Francis had a special love for animals.

Saint Francis' love for animals reminds me of today's First Reading, from the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis. There is Adam, the first man. And God says, **"It is not good for the man to be alone"** [Genesis 2: 18]. So God creates the animals and Adam names each one of them.

But God knows that none of the animals, as nice as they were, could be a suitable partner for Adam. So God, the Author of Life, puts Adam to sleep, takes out one of his ribs, and creates the first woman, Eve. And God presents them to each other in marriage.

Notice that from the very beginning – in this first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 2 – marriage between a man and a woman was God's idea and is God's gift to the human race.

In today's Gospel, Jesus quotes from this same passage from Genesis: **"God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"** [Mark 10: 6-8 and Genesis 2: 24].

Jesus then raises God's original gift of marriage to be a sacrament. That is how sacred the calling of marriage is. A couple united in faithful love, and in cooperation with God, the Author of Life, may even find that their love for each other becomes flesh, incarnate, in the conception of a child.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus embraces the children and blesses them, saying: **“Let the children come to Me. Do not prevent them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”** [Mark 10: 14].

These readings from the Bible are perfect for this first Sunday of October, known as **Respect Life Sunday**.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was the Cardinal-Archbishop of Chicago who died in 1996. He crafted the expression “a consistent ethic of life” and he described it as “a seamless garment.”

This “consistent ethic of life,” like “a seamless garment,” means that we are called to reverence **every** human life, from the moment life begins at conception until God calls us home through natural death, and **every** moment in between.

And then to be consistent with our reverence for children in the womb, we cannot be indifferent to the world that children will be born into. We cannot be insensitive to the poor and the hungry, to the immigrants and the homeless, to the ill and the elderly, to those with disabilities, to those who are discriminated against. We cannot become calloused to shootings and violence and terrorism and war.

“A consistent ethic of life,” like “a seamless garment,” means reverence for **all** human life, from the moment it begins in the womb until natural death – and at **every** moment in between.

When Mother Teresa accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 1979 in Oslo, Norway, she said, in front of the whole world: “The greatest destroyer of peace today is the cry of the innocent unborn child. For if a mother can take the life of her own child in her own womb, what is left for you and for me to kill each other?”

Why did she say that? Because if we do not protect the smallest and most vulnerable members of our society, we risk creating a ripple effect in the ways that we human beings treat each other in the many complicated issues in our world.

I am concerned that some of our political ads are more resembling reality TV shows, than offering opportunities for serious moral thinking and conversations.

Priority issues – and there are several – must weigh heavily upon our consciences as we make our election decisions. And as the Bishops of our country remind us, the protection of unborn human life is truly **the premier civil rights issue** of our day.

We have a lot to pray about in our world today. To care for all of God's children, those who are waiting to be born, as well as those who are suffering from national conflicts, hurricanes, storms, tornadoes and wildfires; to live in peace as the brothers and sisters that God has created to be; and to take responsible care of this beautiful world that the Lord has entrusted to our stewardship as disciples of Jesus.

Let us ask the prayers of Mary Immaculate, the patroness of our United States, and of good ol' Saint Francis of Assisi, that we may walk together in God's pathways of peace and justice for all

“May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives” [Responsorial Psalm 128: 5].