

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

October 6, 2013

Homily for the Anglican Use Mass

of

St. Thomas More Catholic Parish

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

Scranton, PA

Luke 7:5-10

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has designated the first Sunday of October as Respect Life Sunday, the Sunday every year when priests across the nation are called to vigorously preach the Gospel of Life. Bishop Bambera will have a Respect Life Mass at noon at the Cathedral, and following this, there is a Respect Life rally at the Lackawanna County Courthouse. I encourage you to devote a portion of your prayers during Eucharistic Adoration this afternoon for the triumph of the Gospel of Life in this country and across the globe.

At the end of the Gospel today Jesus tells us that we are to tell Him, “We are unworthy servants. We have only done what was our duty.” In the context of Respect Life Sunday, I thought we should consider what is our duty towards those who are the proponents and the victims of the culture of death. And our Epistle gives us some helpful guidance in this regard, when St. Paul writes, “Do not be ashamed . . .of testifying to our Lord.”

The first way we fulfill our obligation to promote the Gospel of Life is simply in testifying to the truth. We must be prepared at a second’s notice to witness to the sanctity of human life, to remind our neighbors that life is a gift and that the right to life is the foundation and basis for all other rights. If the right to life is not protected, then every other right is at risk of being abrogated by the state, as well; and we have seen this writ large over the past two years. Because the current administration holds that abortion is a right, it also maintains that we as Americans have the obligation to pay for our neighbor to exercise that right. Thus, our right to religious freedom is abrogated, since the state has attempted to make us complicit in an objective moral evil. Being able to articulate this clearly and concisely to our neighbors is one way we can witness to the sanctity of human life. Indeed, later in the month I will be at the Catholic Medical Association’s annual conference with Dr. Huffman and Dr. O’Donnell, so that we can come here to give you even more ways to proclaim the right to life.

This conference we’re attending points to the second way we can fulfill our duty with regard to the Gospel of Life. That is, words, quite simply, are not enough. We must also make sacrifices that are representative of the love we have for the unborn and others whose lives are at risk because of the culture of death. This conference in California is something new our parish has undertaken, but we have for years sent dozens of people each January down to Washington for the annual March for Life protest. Last year there were about a half-million people marching with us, offering our public witness to the truths we ought to be able to express privately every day. Now is the time to begin planning to participate in that march. It is only three months away, and the constraints on our budget mean we don’t know how much aid we’ll be able to offer. We hope you will offer this sacrifice on behalf of the unborn, nevertheless, should you have to pay for it yourself.

Even if you are not able to go to Washington, there is a third way we can fulfill our duty to Jesus. That is by demonstrating our love for other victims of the culture of death. Thus, in making contributions to Birthright, for example, we can help persuade a woman considering abortion that there is a better alternative. In contributing to the work of Rachel’s Vineyard, we can demonstrate our solidarity with

those who are struggling to overcome the trauma of abortion. And, of course, through our charity and compassion, we can embody the forgiveness that Jesus offers to those who have gone astray.

Forgiveness, after all, is the context of the apostles' request that Jesus increase their faith. In the verses immediately preceding today's Gospel, Jesus had told them that they must forgive their neighbor who sins against them seven times in one day; if he should repent seven times, they must forgive him. Jesus' answer to their request for faith is enigmatic, but we see it relates to our works. He tells the parable of the worker in the field who must return from his labor to serve his master more. Well, the master in that parable is Jesus, and the servant in the field who must also serve his master at table—that's you and me.

Jesus' answer to the request that He increase His disciples' faith is that His disciples should do more good works. We find here an important and irrefutable principle: if we want to increase our faith, we must undertake more of the works that faith inspires. And if at first our faith is unmoved, we must work more.

The first time Kristina and I went down to the March for Life, we were still Episcopalians. And we heard for the first time people praying the Rosary. It made no sense to us, but neither did we engage in conversation with any of the Catholics who were pleading St. Mary's intercession for the end to abortion. In later years, we were intentional about talking to other pro-lifers, and we found the March for Life to be dominated by Catholics. Naturally, this led us to see that what we already believed was proclaimed in the Catholic Church, and it wasn't long before we were the Catholics at the March praying the Rosary and encouraging Episcopalians to be reconciled to Holy Mother Church. One of the Episcopalians we met at the March is now a Catholic priest, Fr. Matt Venuti, who serves the Ordinariate in Mobile, Alabama. Our faith grew as we worked harder, and as we worked, we helped to increase the Faith in others.

It is easy on Respect Life Sunday to feel powerless, to look at forty years of legalized abortion and wonder what difference we are making. But the Lord's words today remind us that God has not called us to great works that alter the course of human history. He has called us, rather, to faithfulness, to the performance of acts of loving service, and when we are done those, to more acts of loving service. If all Catholics were to undertake such works, then our faith would increase, and the faith of the world would increase, too. In the end the course of human history would indeed be altered. So commit yourself to being faithful by undertaking works that underscore the sanctity of human life. And eventually the lie that is the culture of death will be exposed for all the world to see, and that lie will be rejected. As the prophet Habakkuk assured us today, "If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."