

October 4, 2009

This Sunday, Catholics throughout our country will celebrate Respect Life Sunday. Its purpose is to inspire us to celebrate and bear witness to God's creative and redeeming love for every human being. Each person, made in the image and likeness of God, is a unique and complex expression of our Divine Creator. Thus, each person is worthy of respect.

We believe that each person, from the moment of conception, possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status. Every institution and policy should be evaluated on whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe people are more important than things.

On July 7th, Pope Benedict XVI issued his third encyclical, "Charity in Truth." The pope reminds us that the truth that God is the creator of all human life, that every life is sacred, and that God has a plan for each person is at the basis of human freedom and the Church's social teaching. It is fundamental to authentic love. Without adherence to this truth, the pope tells us, love falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions.

Pope Benedict tells us in his encyclical: "Without truth and the love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests in the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation." Indeed, truth must be the criterion that governs moral action.

In his encyclical, Pope Benedict reminds us that openness to life is at the center of true human development. "When a society moves toward the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and

energy to strive for man's true good." The acceptance of life strengthens our moral fiber and makes us capable of genuine mutual help.

Until we as individuals and as a society make a profound commitment to the value and dignity of every human person, we will never find true peace and justice. Only with the respect for the life and dignity of every human person will we overcome the great ills confronting society today, including abortion, euthanasia, violence, racism, poverty, cloning, and other crimes against life.

The pro-life imperative challenges us to give primacy to being rather than having, to persons rather than to things. It calls us to move from indifference to the concerns of others, to genuine love and solidarity with others. As Jesus said: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto me" (Mt 25:40).

Respect Life Sunday is an occasion for all of us to thank God for the precious gift of life. We re-dedicate ourselves to upholding the sanctity of human life and to advocate for public policies respectful of the human person at every stage and in every circumstance of life. In this way, we do our small part to create a culture which affirms the miracle and glory of every human life.