

Archbishop Lori's Homily - "Life Is Beautiful" Mass

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Life Is Beautiful" Mass

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption

Jan. 14, 2018

In April 1965, *Life* magazine published photos of an infant in the womb of its mother. This photo essay was entitled, "The Drama of Life before Birth." It was remarkable not only for the technology that enabled these stunning photographic images of an unborn baby, but also for the degree of wonderment that this essay inspired in many hearts: many saw in those images the humanity of the unborn child. "Life is beautiful," they must have said.

Today, such technology is commonplace. Contemporary ultrasound technology enables an expectant mother to see even more clearly the tiny, developing child in her womb. Since 2009, the Knights of Columbus have placed over 800 ultrasound machines in pro-life pregnancy centers throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere. For many women, these ultrasound images are a godsend. Even in difficult situations that might have led to a different decision, most of these women, upon seeing their child, elect to bring it to term. Many of them say: "My baby is so beautiful!" Indeed, life is beautiful.

Some of the young adults who are parishioners of this Basilica work in medicine and in medical research. Daily they encounter the wonder of human existence. Amid the advances in research and medical technology, they know that many secrets are yet to be discovered in the intricacies of the human mind, body, and spirit. The exultant words of the psalmist, addressed to the Creator, come to mind:

"You formed my inmost being
you knit me in my mother's womb
I praise you because I am wonderfully made
wonderful are your works
my very self you know" (Psalm 139:14).

Or, as the lyrics of an old hymn would say,
“O Spirit, your revealing light
Has led our questing souls aright;
Source of our science, you have taught
the marvels human minds have wrought” (O Father Whose Creating Hand).

It’s all another way of saying, “Life is beautiful!”

Yes, we celebrate the beauty of human life in its form and complexity; but we also celebrate the beauty of life because it has a purpose. When I was growing up, we learned the faith from the *Baltimore Catechism*. As I labored over my homework assignments, little did I realize that someday I’d live in the house where it was invented! The most famous of the Baltimore Catechism questions is No. 6 & it goes like this: Question: “Why did God make you?” Answer: “God made me to know, love, and serve him in this life and to be happy with him forever in the next.”

After all these years, I find it hard to argue with that answer: God made me for a purpose in the here and the hereafter. Pope Benedict XVI developed this thought when he wrote: “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.” How beautiful life is when we realize that God has personally willed us into being.

What’s more, Blessed John Henry Newman tells us that God created us to know, love, and serve him in some special way; he writes: “God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed to me some work which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next.” Along the way, with God’s grace, we may discern our vocation and our career, yet we may or may not know how in God’s design our life is meant to touch, even transform the lives of others, to make a tremendous difference almost without our realizing it. A life willed by God. A life with purpose... eternal purpose. Life is beautiful!

Yet, our sense of the mysterious beauty of human life deepens as we hear God calling Samuel in the middle of the night. Neither the elder Eli nor the young Samuel at first recognized the voice of God; but Eli, in the wisdom of holiness and advancing

years, came to realize it was God who was calling the young man. So he instructed Samuel to respond to the Lord's call, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." So he did. And in God's hands, Samuel changed the history of Israel. Not everyone is marked out for a special role such as Samuel but God does call each of us, personally and by name. We may resist his call, it may take years for his call to reach our ears, yet how beautiful that God would address to us personally his Word of Life. Life is beautiful.

Yet, that Word is more than an invitation to do the good and avoid evil. Important as that is, the call we receive from the Lord goes deeper. It's actually the question Jesus addressed to the two disciples in today's Gospel: "What are you looking for?" "What is the deepest desire of your heart?" "What will give meaning, purpose, and beauty to your life?" The answer is found also in the Gospel where the two disciples stay with Jesus - they abide with Jesus and begin to find in him a love unlike any other love, the infinitely merciful love found only in very heart of God, the only love that satisfies the deepest longings of the human spirit. St. Augustine, pouring out his heart to God in his Confessions famously wrote: "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." God has willed us into being, created us for a purpose, made us for his love, and along the way has endowed us, each of us, with an inviolable dignity. For this gift, we give God thanks and praise: Life is beautiful.

In thanking God for the gift of life we recognize how sin has disfigured it and in the same breath we recognize how many people suffer from violence and deprivation of all kinds, indeed not very far from this Basilica. And how, dear friends, often nascent human life never sees the light of day while the lives of the elderly, frail, or chronically ill are undervalued and threatened. It is difficult for many people to see beauty or purpose in those who suffer. Yet so often it is the poor, the sick, and the suffering who lead us to Jesus. How often I've held the hand of a dying person only to have my faith deepened. How often I've gone to console or minister to a person in need, only to find in them a closeness to the Lord at which I can only marvel.

The beauty of human life is not merely on the surface. It is a deep, spiritual beauty, inscribed in every human life by the Creator. And it is this beauty that opens our minds and hearts to the truth about human dignity, about the respect we owe human

life from conception until natural death, about the reverence with which we should treat our bodies. For, as St. Paul taught the Corinthians: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body." Thus does human life reach the pinnacle of its beauty!

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!