

Catholic Review Column: Masterpieces of God's Creation

Next Sunday, our church will celebrate Respect Life Sunday. It is the official beginning of our observance of Respect Life Month, whose theme this year is "Each of Us is a Masterpiece of God's Creation." This theme reflects what we, as Catholics, believe: "When God created each of us, he did so with precision and purpose, and he looks on each of us with love that cannot be outdone in intensity or tenderness. We must look at ourselves and at others in light of this truth and treat all people with the reverence and respect which is due," said Cardinal Sean O'Malley, secretary of Pro-Life Activities for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This belief is the underpinning of the church's social teaching on issues ranging from abortion to care for the elderly, the poor, the sick, and other vulnerable members of our society.

"Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect," Pope Francis said in his 2013 Day of Life greeting.

This is the belief that animates the pope's many acts of kindness and goodness. This is the belief that should animate the acts of all Catholics. And this is the belief that will help us overcome the "throwaway culture" that best describes a society all too quick to discard unwanted unborn children, those suffering with terminal illnesses and even those with no means to care for themselves.

"Every unborn child, though unjustly condemned to be aborted, has the face of the Lord, who even before his birth, and then as soon as he was born, experienced the rejection of the world," Pope Francis said. "And every old person, even if infirm and at the end of his days, carries with him the face of Christ. They must not be thrown away!"

If we are to actively promote a culture that embraces life over death, our first

response to those around us who are in true need must be to offer our love. Our response to a societal mentality that calls for “the elimination of human beings, above all if they are physically or socially weaker,” the pope said, “is a decisive and unhesitating ‘yes’ to life.”

Our “yes” comes in many forms. First, we turn to God in prayer and through the sacraments for wisdom and clarity, but also for the patience and kindness needed to treat others as “masterpieces of his creation.”

Our “yes” to life can also come in the form of support, directly or indirectly, for the vulnerable. Donate time or goods to a pregnancy center that serves women in crisis pregnancies, donate food or serve meals at Our Daily Bread or another such place that serves meals to the poor, sign up to pray for an hour at a nearby church where perpetual adoration is offered.

“Our mission is to show each person the love of Christ,” Cardinal O’Malley said. “As uniquely created individuals, we each have unique gifts which we are called to use to share Christ’s love. We are continually given opportunities to do so in our interactions with the cashier at the grocery store, our spouses, children, friends and even the people we encounter in traffic. Each of these moments is valuable beyond our realization. We may never know how much a simple gesture of compassion may affect someone’s life.”

This October, I invite you to join me in taking advantage of these special opportunities to affirm life, so that our hearts and minds might be more open to doing so the other 11 months of the year, so urgent is the work.