

New saints' ministry embodies value of life

We encompass so many issues when we speak of respecting the “dignity of life” in all aspects. When Catholics and many others speak of respecting life from conception to natural death, abortion and euthanasia come to mind as key issues. We don't wish to end a most vulnerable life even before the child has emerged from the womb, and we don't want to hasten the end of life.

There is a vast spectrum, however, between those two points on the lifeline. We contend that all life is sacred, which requires us to treat others with respect and dignity. The Golden Rule - “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” - comes to mind, as does Jesus' admonition, “Whatever you did for these least ones, you did for me.”

This means that if we truly hold all life sacred, then we care for the poor and the destitute. We care for women who are escaping domestic violence. We care for people with disabilities and intellectual challenges. We don't rail against immigrants as though they are not worthy to be our neighbors, co-workers and fellow countrymen.

In an Oct. 2 at the ceremony welcoming Miguel Diaz as the new U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, Pope Benedict reinforced the link between social issues and the respect for life, harkening back to the previous pope's encyclical on “The Gospel of Life.”

“The Church insists on the unbreakable link between an ethics of life and every other aspect of social ethics,” Pope Benedict said, “for she is convinced that, in the prophetic words of the late Pope John Paul II, ‘a society lacks solid foundations

when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.’”

Two saints-to-be with ties to America lived profoundly strong commitments to the value of each life. Blessed Damien de Veuster and Blessed Jeanne Jugan touched thousands of lives through ministries in which they saw the dignity of each life, even in the midst of hardship. Though neither was born in the United States, the impact of their work ripples through even today, as those who have been inspired by their example, working as Father Damien did to treat and find cures for Hansen’s disease, and to serve the elderly as Jeanne Jugan did, and her Little Sisters of the Poor still do today.

Father Damien of Molokai’s work among lepers in Hawaii is known for embracing those to whom he ministered despite an illness that turned away others. He saw dignity in those with Hansen’s disease and showed them the love of Christ. We see that same spirit reflected in the church’s many ministries to and with those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Blessed Jeanne, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, who serve in our archdiocese as part of their ministry to 13,000 elderly in 202 homes in 32 countries, was inspired to serve with love and compassion. Her sisters live simply, begging often to provide services and support to their mission. Following the example of Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters, and many others who serve the elderly, live a message of respect for life.

These two will be among five people formally enrolled in the canon of saints Oct. 11 by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. May their example, and that of others in the communion of saints, inspire us all to respect and celebrate the dignity and sanctity

of all life.

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