

Respect for all life

On Oct. 3, we celebrated Respect Life Sunday. In our intercessions we prayed for newborn babies, for married couples, for government leaders, those in prisons, hospitals and at home who are near death. We prayed for the elderly, those threatened by violence, women who have had abortions, as well as those who are in their healing process.

We invoke Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Patroness of the Unborn, since her image in the apparitions is that of a pregnant woman. Furthermore, in the seven years after her apparitions, approximately 8 million Aztecs converted to Catholicism, leaving behind a culture of death that practiced human sacrifice, including infant sacrifice. We invoke the intercession of Our Lady to end the injustices of abortion, euthanasia and the neglect of people's basic human needs.

As I write these words, I cannot help but remember the famous phrase of the late Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin. Referring to the church's moral teaching, he pointed out that our respect for life must include *all* life; it has to be a "seamless garment." We cannot profess to be pro-life and in favor of the death penalty at the same time. I am not referring here to personal opinions, but to church teaching. This is a part of who we are as Catholics.

As we look at these teachings in the light of our present day reality that includes millions of Catholic immigrants, we cannot allow the media and the politicians to hijack the truth of our Catholic teachings. Every human life comes from God, is sacred and is to be respected. The image of God that we reflect is not dictated by color or language or economics. Our basic human dignity lies in the fact that we are all children of God and any type of discrimination is therefore a sin. The human person always has priority over structures and material goods; in fact, these systems should be at the service of the human person and not vice versa.

Day after day, families are being separated as people seek honest work to support their loved ones. Violence against immigrants has increased and very often goes unreported for fear of being deported (consequently, real crime statistics are unknown). Legislatures try to introduce draconian measures that in no way address

the overall reality. Millions of our own Catholic people are suffering under the guise of Christ the immigrant and even many more millions of our own Catholic people do not recognize them. We are faced with Lazarus and the rich man once again. The great sin of the rich man was that of omission, what he failed to do for Lazarus. It was not that he insulted him, kicked, punched or beat him. He simply did not care to recognize his needs.

As we pray for life, we pray for *all* life; as we seek respect for life, we must respect *all* life. Isn't it interesting that this month, that starts off with Respect Life Sunday, also coincides with the month in which we celebrate Hispanic heritage? It's ironic that the patroness we invoke to respect life appeared in Mexico, where many of our immigrants come from. Could it be that we are being invited to actively reach out in love to our immigrant brothers and sisters as we also pray for them, respect them and seek justice for them?

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