

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
10/6/2024

## FOUR SETS OF TOOLS

In the beginning, before the fall, before original sin, there was original unity: the original unity of man and woman seen in Adam and Eve. But unfortunately, Original sin, the disobedience of Adam and Eve did not destroy this unity but terribly impaired it.

Jump ahead to today's Gospel. There were two schools of Jewish thought about divorce. One was that a man could divorce his wife for a serious reason and that he could do so for any reason. The rights of the wife were between slim and none. It's as if the Pharisees are asking Jesus, *Are you liberal or conservative, blue or red?*

When Jesus asks them, they refer to Moses. Responding, Jesus doesn't refer to Moses but what was, *From the beginning*. His position isn't liberal or conservative, it's radical—it goes back to the roots of humanity. Jesus forbids what Jewish and pagan law allows. Jesus seeks to restore marriage to the original unity that existed before original sin.

Jesus goes on to speak strong words about the permanence of marriage. These words can be comforting to some, challenging to others, and painful to still others but Jesus doesn't speak to hurt but to help. Jesus' vision of marriage was different from his contemporary culture, both Jewish and Roman, and it continues to differ from contemporary culture today. Both those cultures and to some extent today's culture, find Jesus' position incomprehensible. There follows the story of Jesus and the children. Marriage is to be the origin of new life. Life is to be the fruit of love. In the child, the love of husband and wife takes on a life of its own and their love for each other walks upon the earth.

October is Respect Life month and this is Respect Life Sunday. St. John Paul II warned against a culture of death, that looks to death as a solution to eliminating the inconvenient, whether they be unborn, the terminally ill, the severely disabled and yes, even hardened criminals. Singing the same song in a different key Pope, Francis

speaks of a throwaway culture where such people, made in the image and likeness of God, are thrown away.

In contrast, there's a culture of life, a culture that sees every human life made in the image and likeness of God, that sees every human life as a unique and unrepeatable gift of God. As disciples of Jesus, we're all called to be part of and to build up that culture of life. We do so with four tools or rather four sets of tools.

The first set is legal advocacy—to labor for the respect due to every human life. This isn't a matter of imposing our religious beliefs on others. To try to prevent restaurants from serving meat on Fridays in Lent would be imposing our religious beliefs. Was Martin Luther King, Jr. imposing religious beliefs when he gave his I Have a Dream speech, or was it a matter of civil rights? Was Harriet Beecher Stowe imposing religious beliefs when she wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, or was it a matter of human rights? Legal advocacy on behalf of life is about civil rights and human rights.

Everything going on with Amendment 3 reminds us of the importance of this and how, in opposing that proposed amendment, we have a chance to directly vote for life, not for a politician who may or may not follow through, but literally to vote for life. But as important and as necessary as legal advocacy is, by itself, it cannot build a true culture of life. Other tools are needed.

The second set of tools is direct aid. Many people do not choose life because they feel as if they have no choice. I am proud of the way so many of our parishioners in one way or another support the Parkville Women's Clinic. Through loving care, always respecting the autonomy of who is before them, they offer aid, support and comfort to mothers with an unplanned pregnancy and also to the fathers. They accompany people with ongoing support that goes well beyond a bag of diapers.

Think of the Little Sisters of the Poor who serve the elderly poor and the Sister Servants of Mary who serve the sick and dying. Think of foster parents, parents who adopt and so many others who offer direct aid. The work of Catholic Community Health serves the dying with compassion and ethically sound medical care according to our faith.

The third set of tools consists in education. To share the truth about life and its goodness; to warn people about the culture of death; to share Jesus who is the way,

the truth and the *life*; to remind people that even in difficult circumstances, there is hope; is to build a culture of life. In our school, our eighth grade students participate in a Respect Life series as different speakers share how they build up a culture of life whether in regards to the unborn, the elderly, capital punishment or a number of other topics.

The fourth set of tools consists in prayer. Prayer is to undergird all of this. Prayer is to strengthen us as building up a culture of life can be hard and at times, discouraging. We pray for others and for ourselves, that we may grow in conversion, in understanding the dignity of human life at every age and every stage. To be grounded in prayer is to be grounded in Christ who said, *I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*

Here in the Eucharist, we listen to Jesus whose words are spirit and life. In the Eucharist, we receive Jesus who is the Bread of Life. Informed by his word, nourished with his body and blood, with lives of intentional faith, may we respect life and build a culture of life. With the four sets of tools: legal advocacy, direct aid, education and prayer, may we never stop insisting, *Every human life is a unique and unrepeatable gift of God.*