

The Sanctity of Life Sunday 2021 – Pastoral letter

The “Sanctity of Life Sunday “is also the Sunday of joy, the third Sunday of Advent, when the birth of Our Saviour is forthcoming. “Shout for joy, daughter Zion, Israel shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem.” (Zeph 3:14) Our whole world can embrace this joy, a joy that cannot be shaken. “The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5) God wants to come and share in our lives and then in turn give us a part in his eternal life.

That is how important we are to God. He has given us our life as an invaluable gift. And through our life we can show our gratitude by living in love and righteousness. As we today celebrate the “Sanctity of Life Sunday” we do so to give thanks for God’s gift and at the same time ask for His help and light, so that more and more people might appreciate the inviolable dignity of life and of its right to be protected under all circumstances.

In the life of Jesus, through all that he says and does, we see how much He loves all people and how much He is willing to do for each one of us. No one is excluded from His love and care. He wants to give all a part in His saving grace and eternal glory. It is never too late to open oneself to Him. As long as we live, we can open ourselves to His grace and receive Him.

That is why the moment of our death is so important. As priests we time and time again experience what grace a person may receive on their deathbed.

Right from the beginning of creation, human life received this invaluable dignity. Man and woman are created in the image of God. Each human being is a unique masterpiece that can never be copied or cloned. Something within the human person points back to God. Each man and each woman is a sign that allows us to imagine something of His mystery. God is never far from anyone. God loves man and He himself became man to redeem his people and give them part in His own divine life.

Each human person has, throughout the duration of his life, from conception to natural death, an inviolable dignity. At the same time, we know that human dignity is always put into question. As Christians we must always dare to make our voices heard and point to each person’s God given dignity, no matter who they are, no matter what they may have done and in whichever state of life they might be. That is why we must renounce abortion, the death penalty, assisted suicide and euthanasia. No one has the right to deprive someone of the gift of life. In spite of all attempts to convince us that we have dominion over life and death and have the right to dispose of it as we wish, we must point to the inalienable right to life. We must as Christians, continue to be the joyful and proud defenders of life.

The words of the Bible strengthen us in this holy vocation:

“Do not fear, O Zion;

let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord your God is in your midst,

a warrior who gives victory;” (Zeph 3:16-17)

It should be for us a great joy to be the defenders of life, so that the culture of death may not prevail.

”Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil.4:5-6). In prayer we can constantly thank God for the wonderful gift of life.

Then we can, in our daily lives, show reverence to the inviolable value of life and defend each person's right to life. If we really follow Jesus in his burning love for mankind, then we will always find ways to stand up for life.

“What should we do? (Luke 3:10,12,14) the people ask John the Baptist three times in today's gospel reading. We too can ask Jesus for advice on how we can become the defenders of life, not only in word but in deed. If we take a moment to reflect, there is a lot that we as Christians can do.

We can support a woman in difficulty who wants to keep her child despite being pressurized by an uncaring and unfaithful boyfriend. We can help a woman who has been trafficked and who wants to give birth to her child by providing her with a safe haven. We can accompany someone on their deathbed by seeing to it that they are not in pain, and we can give them human comfort. We can engage ourselves against the death penalty in countries where people are still put to death. There is always something that we can do if we listen to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Every day we can make life a little easier for someone struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide by showing love and care.

During advent we look forward to the child that will be born. We ask this child for help for all those children who are in danger of not being born. This year the “Sanctity of Life Sunday” is celebrated on the 12th of December, the same day that we celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe. This feast has its origin in a Marian apparition in Mexico, in which a poor and vulnerable Indian man, Juan Diego, saw the Virgin Mary who promised him her protection. This apparition played a decisive role in the evangelization of this part of the world. The oppressed and those under threat understood that God wanted to show them his love and help through the Virgin Mary. For this reason, one looks upon Our Lady of Guadalupe as the intercessor and defender of the unborn.

During Advent we wait together with the Virgin Mary for Jesus to be born into the world. Together with her we rejoice at this great event that will forever transform the history of the world. He who has created the world and holds it in his hands will come down to us in our weakness and poverty. He will share our human existence and live the life that we live. That is how important we are for Him, each one of us, whoever we are. We can never fully understand how infinitely loved we are, but through the life of Jesus we can get more and more insight into God's love for us. He has given us our life as a wonderful gift, where we can get to know Him and learn to receive His love and respond to it. That is why the value of life is priceless. That is why we can rejoice and give thanks for the gift of life. That is why we want to be the defenders of life in all circumstances. We want to sing this song of praise to Him who is the Lord and giver of life, now and always, even if it should cost us our lives.

With prayers and blessings,

+ Anders Arborelius ocd