



Homily Helps for Respect Life Month

“Be Not Afraid”

Suggested Observance:

Respect Life Sunday, October 1, 2017

[Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time](#)

The [Respect Life Program](#), sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, started in 1972 and begins anew each October—the month set aside by the U.S. bishops as “Respect Life Month.”

The program promotes respect for human life in light of our intrinsic dignity as having been created in God’s image and likeness and called to an eternal destiny with him.

New materials are designed each year to assist those in various roles within the Church to help Catholics understand, value, and become engaged with supporting the dignity of every person, especially by cherishing God’s gift of life.

www.usccb.org/respectlife

MORE!

Take a look at the [2017-18 Respect Life Clergy Kit](#) for more *free* resources and ideas for sharing the life-giving message, “Be Not Afraid”!

Homily Helps: Q & A

What are these?

The following readings and notes are provided to assist with sharing the Christian message of hope, courage, and mission in relation to God’s gift of human life. The notes unpack the [reflection flyer](#) on the 2017-18 Respect Life theme, “Be Not Afraid,” and integrate the readings of Sunday, October 1, 2017 (Respect Life Sunday).

Who are they for?

Although especially developed to assist priests and deacons with sharing the Gospel of Life in their homilies, *these notes can also be used by other Catholic leaders.*

For example, during Respect Life Month, high school teachers could incorporate one or more points into classes on Scripture, morality, Catholic Social Teaching, etc. Youth ministers could use the notes to develop a short reflection for a Respect Life event marking the annual [Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn](#) in January. Anyone is welcome to use them to help build a culture of life!

How do I use them?

These notes are structured to be adaptable for your needs. Three different approaches for integrating the message of “Be Not Afraid,” drawing from the readings of October 1, are provided. You are welcome to pull individual points, use one approach in its entirety, combine aspects from multiple approaches, condense all three approaches into a single message, or any other variation that is useful to you.

When do I use them?

The notes are suggested for use on October 1, 2017 (Respect Life Sunday), but you are welcome to use them at any time—during Respect Life Month (October) or otherwise.

Anything else?

Yes! Take a look at the [2017-18 Respect Life Clergy Kit](#) for other resources and ideas for sharing the life-giving message of “Be Not Afraid”! (Customized toolkits for other Catholic leaders are also available at www.usccb.org/respectlife.)

Readings for Sunday, October 1, 2017

Readings

First Reading: Ez 18:25-28

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: Phil 2:1-11

Gospel Acclamation: Jn 10:27

Gospel: Mt 21:28-32

First Reading: Ez 18:25-28

Thus says the LORD:

You say, “The LORD’s way is not fair!”

Hear now, house of Israel:

Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?

When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies,
it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die.

But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed,

he does what is right and just,

he shall preserve his life;

since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed,

he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (6a) Remember your mercies, O Lord.
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.
Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.
The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;
in your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.
Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way.
R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Second Reading: Phil 2:1-11

Brothers and sisters:
If there is any encouragement in Christ,
any solace in love,
any participation in the Spirit,
any compassion and mercy,
complete my joy by being of the same mind, with
the same love,
united in heart, thinking one thing.
Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory;
rather, humbly regard others as more important
than yourselves,
each looking out not for his own interests,
but also for those of others.

Have in you the same attitude
that is also in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel Acclamation: Jn 10:27

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;
I know them, and they follow me.

Gospel: Mt 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people:
“What is your opinion?
A man had two sons.
He came to the first and said,
‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’
He said in reply, ‘I will not,’
but afterwards changed his mind and went.
The man came to the other son and gave the same order.
He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go.
Which of the two did his father’s will?”
They answered, “The first.”
Jesus said to them, “Amen, I say to you,
tax collectors and prostitutes
are entering the kingdom of God before you.
When John came to you in the way of righteousness,
you did not believe him;
but tax collectors and prostitutes did.
Yet even when you saw that,
you did not later change your minds and believe him.”

Homily Notes

(Note: Phrases pulled from the readings into the homily notes are marked with quotation marks.)

I. We can trust and follow God even—especially—in difficult times.

- a. Today’s First Reading presents the anguished cry of one who struggles with God’s commands for his people—they protest the unfairness of the LORD’s ways. It can be a challenge to form the conscience correctly when the things that are right and just involve hardship. How can we follow what the Church teaches at times when it just seems to make our lives more difficult? How can we accompany others when they face difficult decisions and are confronted by temptations that go against God’s love for every human person?

Example: The experience or prospect of suffering at the end of our lives can seem like too great a burden to bear with dignity, and bringing death about sooner may seem like the compassionate thing to do. But as Pope Francis reminds us, “compassion means ‘suffer with,’”ⁱ and we know that our God-given human dignity is not something that can be lost or diminished—regardless of circumstances.

The Church’s teaching about respecting the dignity of every human life until its natural end may at times seem unfair. But how God’s law *seems* is not how it is in reality—Ezekiel tells us that God is always on the side of *life*: following his ways can seem difficult at first, but in the end, those who turn away from sin “shall surely live.” (See “[Catholic Considerations for Our Earthly Passing](#).”)

- b. A Christian life of charity and faith is the most effective way to spread the Gospel. Christ challenges us to follow the “way of righteousness” in today’s Gospel. It is our deeds, not simply our words and good intentions, that count in following him. That is why Christ’s words to the Pharisees are so strong: “Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.”

Today’s Gospel shows us that the way of righteousness is marked by humility and obedience. We can be channels of his compassion and mercy through this same humble obedience, which God’s love can transform into a manifestation of his glory. Christ says, for those who follow him, “my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt 11:30).

II. God is with us and asks us to be channels of His love for others.

The Psalm reminds us that we don’t need to face these trials alone or have everything figured out for ourselves. If we trust in the LORD and ask him for his compassion and love, he will not fail us. He is so kind and merciful that when we turn to him and make ourselves humble—as Mary did with her continual *fiat*—he will teach us how to follow him. And, as Ezekiel says of the sinner who repents, “he shall surely live, he shall not die.” We have nothing to fear if we remain humble and open to what God

has planned for us. Even if the future seems uncertain, God can transform any bit of obedience into his glory, where compassion and mercy flow.

Example: Showing the love of Christ to women who are considering abortion is one of the most sensitive, and most important, ways we may be called to witness to the dignity of each person. In these moments, we have the responsibility to respond in a loving way that is life-affirming for both the mother and her baby. We may be afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing, but we need to ask God to guide us and trust him. (Practical guidance can be found in “[What to Do When a Friend is Considering Abortion.](#)”)

III. We are sent on mission to build a culture of life.

- a. God is filled to overflowing with compassion and mercy (his are “from of old”), and the way he shows it is by giving his guidance, which always leads to life, through the Church. The Gospel Acclamation from St. John’s Gospel connects these ideas: when the sheep hear his voice, as Catholics do through the Church, God “knows them” and can show his compassion and mercy to all who are, as St. Paul says, “in Christ.”

God has a plan for each person, and his guidance never compromises the happiness of a person for his own ends. When he speaks through his Church, we can trust that we “will not die,” because he knows us so intimately and has no limit to his compassion and mercy.

- b. The humility and obedience of Christ and Mary is an effective model for how we can go out into the world and share the encouragement and solace that comes from following the ways of God, humbly regarding others as more important than ourselves, just as St. Paul tells us Christ did. It’s not only in word, but also in deeds, in *following*, that we spread the Gospel and find the Lord’s compassion and mercy for ourselves.

Example: Building a culture of life will always require the Christian to go out into the world, to cultivate around himself what Pope Francis calls a “culture of encounter,” having, as St. Paul teaches, “the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.” This is not something we can do by ourselves—Christ himself makes it possible. We need not be discouraged when, like the elders whom Christ chastises in the Gospel reading from St. Matthew, the culture does not immediately “change its mind and believe.” God will “guide the humble to justice”; we only must follow where his voice leads, knowing that his plan is always triumphant in the end. (See: “[How to Build a Culture of Life.](#)”)

ⁱ Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, April 27, 2016, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016).