

29th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "B"

October 20-21, 2018

Readings: Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

Our Old Testament lesson today hearkens to a key passage in the Book of the prophet Isaiah, one that has greatly impacted Christian thought through the centuries. Christians clearly see in the figure of the suffering servant the pre-figuration of Jesus Christ.¹ This passage is referred to as the fourth hymn of the Book of Isaiah which proclaims the Servant of Yahweh, the mysterious man of suffering, in whom Christians see a prefiguration of Jesus the Messiah, so vividly and profoundly is his passion described.

The canticle speaks of Christ who suffers with patience, without recrimination or complaint, not simply from a spirit of passive resignation, but trusting himself "to him who judges justly." He is our Savior by becoming one of us and bearing in his body our sins; he liberates weak human beings from the ways of evil and brings us back to "justice," that is, to God's [plan] for our lives.²

October is Respect Life Month. Can we see in the senseless killing of the unborn an echo of the suffering servant first foretold through the prophet Isaiah? Faithful people committed to the protection of the unborn labor tirelessly, trying to save lives, in differing yet complementary ways.

Some focus on legislation, others on the courts, others through means of the education of our young people in schools, still others help by directly appealing to women outside of abortion clinics throughout this land. All of these approaches are necessary, and each in its own way contributes to creating and fostering a culture of life.

Often done in relative silence, without fanfare or recognition, these efforts represent the polar opposite to the attitude that once motivated

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 601: "In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant. Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God's suffering Servant."

² See Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 22 September, 2004

James and John. Out of ignorance, pride, or a combination of both, they desired to sit at the right hand of the Father in heavenly glory.

In one of his 2nd century works, St. Irenaeus of Lyon summarized the figure of Jesus: “There is only one Jesus Christ, Son of God, who through his Passion has reconciled us with God... he was buffeted but did not return the blows, ‘while suffering he did not threaten,’ and while suffering tyrannical violence, he prayed to the Father to forgive those who had crucified him.”³

Jesus told them that they did not know what they were asking. He told them as he does to us, “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant.” There are many ways to serve, and some require an investment of time. Personal witness can be done in seeming insignificant ways that can have a lasting impact. The witness of a young person to the sanctity of human life is a most powerful one, in all probability much more powerful than mine. People expect as much from us; but when a young college student is at a gathering and politics, religion or social concerns come up, there is a powerful opportunity.

The battle for the protection of all human life—especially that of the unborn— is waged and won in coffee shops, blogs, twitter postings, every bit as much as it will be won in churches. It is a battle that must be waged on the front lines, meaning any place in which people’s convictions are being formed.

For example, some clever women responded to the President of France who, when lamenting the lack of education in Africa said: “Present me the women who decided, being perfectly educated, to have seven, eight or nine children.” They responded by posting photos of their large families on Twitter, including some with Mom dressed in PhD robes! The battle is also waged and won whenever we take seriously our civic duty to vote our consciences and convictions, as we will next month.

³ Irenaeus of Lyon, “Against the Heresies” (III, 16,9, Milan)

Pope John Paul II acceded to the Chair of St. Peter forty years ago, installed October 22, 1978. His papacy consistently highlighted the dignity of the human person. I close today with words from his monumental encyclical “The Gospel of Life” in which he stated:

“The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop.”⁴

May we heed these words in our lives and in our witness to life.

⁴ Pope John Pau II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, (1995), paragraph # 101.