

**Homily for Curia Respect Life Mass  
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**Catholic Pastoral Center  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: in 1999, author Catherine Ryan Hyde published a novel about a twelve-year old boy who was challenged by his social studies teacher to come up with a plan that would change the world for the better. Trevor, the young man, decided he would do a good deed for three people and would then ask them to do the same for others. The idea is that a few good deeds could be multiplied into many more, thus having the potential of changing the world for good.

The title of the book is *Pay it Forward*, and this concept has grown in popularity, to the point that there is even a “Pay it Forward Day” that takes place each year on the last Thursday of April. People are invited to perform one to three good deeds on that day for somebody in need. The deed does not have to be extraordinary, but could be as simple as visiting an elderly neighbor for a few minutes or making a donation to your favorite charity.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, I heard of a story of any example of how one person put this into practice. A woman had gone to a fast food restaurant and decided to pay for the order of the person who was behind her in the drive-up lane. Not thinking much about the act of kindness, she drove on her way. A few minutes later, the woman arrived at her destination and was approached by another woman who had followed been following her – it was the recipient of her act of kindness.

The woman approach and asked the question: “Why did you pay for my order?” The other woman responded that she just wanted to do something nice for another person. The woman who had received the act of kindness broke down and cried. She said that, after stopping at the restaurant, her plan was to end her life by committing suicide. After hearing that the person in front of her had paid for her order, she changed her mind and decided not to go through with her plan.

Before encountering the kindness of a stranger, the woman had made the decision that her life was no longer worth living. The other woman, through a seemingly small act of kindness, gave the other woman the message that she was not alone and that somebody did indeed care for her. That was enough for God’s grace to change her mind to see that life was

worth living. We don't know the circumstances that led to her being so depressed, or what she would continue to face in her life. The important thing is that through another person, she was reminded that her life was a gift, and that gift was worth continuing.

This story is a good example of how things often work in our faith. The little bit that we bring to the Lord is often multiplied into something far beyond what we could have imagined. Our willingness to share what may seem insignificant is not ignored by God, but when we offer those actions with love, God's love transforms them to accomplish His will in our lives and in the lives of others.

This story is also a good example of one of the ways in which we express our respect for human life. When we talk about respect for life, we tend to limit our focus those issues which are most controversial in our society, such as abortion, immigration, care for the poor, and treatment of the infirm and elderly. As the theme for this Respect Life Month reminds us, *every* life is worth living. And if every life is worth living, then every life is worth respecting and treating with the love that Jesus expects of us.

In saying this, I am not suggesting that those traditional topics on which we often focus when speaking about respect for life are

unimportant. I am fairly confident that all of us gathered here realize the importance of working on these causes, so not much needs to be said here. To spend time focusing on them in this homily would be, to use the old cliché, like “preaching to the choir.” I am inviting us to see how, in addition to our efforts in those areas, we can show respect for every life with whom we come into contact in our daily lives. One of the ways of doing this is through those small acts of kindness and generosity that may seem so little, but can have a profound impact on making others feel that they are important and that we truly care for them.

There is a connection here with another theme that we have been talking about a lot in our diocese, the theme of stewardship. When people hear this word, many tend to focus on the financial aspect. We know, however, that to be a good steward is more than just about being generous with our money. It is a way of life that affects all that we do and all that we have. There is no area of our lives that is outside of the scope of stewardship. And since the greatest gift that we have is that of human life, it makes sense that we should make every effort to be good stewards of every aspect of our life and of every life that we encounter.

In the Gospel for today's Mass, we hear one of the parables that Jesus uses to teach about stewardship. He speaks about the imprudent steward who becomes distracted with focusing on his own pursuits and interests, and he fails to take care of the work that has been entrusted to him. We need to be aware of how easily we can be distracted by things in our lives which prevent us from being good stewards to those around us.

One of those distractions is with our time. We all have a lot to do and we are all busy. Doing something for somebody else, even if it is something small, may seem like an imposition on our time. We may feel as though we have more important things to do than to stop and chat for just a few minutes with somebody we see. We may not want to be interrupted by the phone call we receive, and so we ignore it. While some excuses are valid ones, we should also reflect on how easily we can exempt ourselves from those situations based on more selfish motives, as with the imprudent steward.

We should never forget how the little effort or time that we give to somebody can be a source of great encouragement and blessing. We often know very little about what is happening in the lives of others, and just a friendly smile or a word of support or gratitude can go a long way and

may even be the little nudge that they need to break out of whatever rut they are in.

When we consistently practice this type of attention and concern for those we encounter every day, whether it be here at the office, in our families, or with those we meet on the street, we will be demonstrating the good stewardship that should be characteristic of disciples of Jesus Christ. Our little efforts will be multiplied by God's blessing in the lives of others and will hopefully open their hearts to act in a similar manner. What results is the spread of God's love in the lives of those around us, and when God enters the equation, remarkable things can and do happen, not the least of which is the conversion of heart that must be the basis for any progress that we hope to make in the work of respect for life at every stage and in every condition.

As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist, we prepare to witness once again the remarkable effects of God's love as He transforms our humble offerings of bread and wine into His Body and His Blood. May we be renewed in our efforts to offer our little acts of charity daily to those we encounter. We have great confidence that these seemingly small

gestures of love can and will be transformed and multiplied by the Lord to build a culture in which all recognize that every life is worth living.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pay It Forward Foundation, <http://payitforwardday.com/>.