

**Homily for the Diocesan Respect Life Mass  
October 3, 2015**

**Holy Family Parish  
Granite City, IL**

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Reverend Fathers and deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here at Holy Family Parish to celebrate this Diocesan Respect Life Mass, after which we will peacefully and prayerfully march to the Hope Abortion Clinic to witness to the dignity of all human life and to implore the assistance of God in bringing about the conversion of hearts for all of those who contribute in any way to promoting a culture of death.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, one of the most popular television shows was hosted by the famous Milton Berle, a comedian and actor who became one of America's first television stars. Tuesday night, the night that the show aired each week, was a time when families would go out of their way to set everything aside in order to watch this entertaining show.

Toward the end of his career, yet while his show was still very popular, another unlikely figure appeared on television on the same night

who gave Milton Berle a run for his money. That figure was not a great comedian or an accomplished actor. The host of the new show was a Roman Catholic bishop, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. The format of the show was really quite simple. It involved Sheen standing at a blackboard, writing and drawing as he spoke about many of the truths of our Catholic faith. The show was remarkably popular and even won an Emmy over Mr. Television himself, Milton Berle.

The reason I bring this up is because the title of Bishop Sheen's television program is very similar to the theme that has been chosen for this year's observance of Respect Life Month in the Church. The title of the show, as some of you may remember, was "Life is Worth Living." In a book with the same name which contained a collection of several of Sheen's most popular episodes, the bishop begins by addressing that important point about the value of life.

In the first few lines of the first chapter, he poses the question: "Is life worth living?" His answer to that question was simple, yet profound at the

same time. He said that life was worth living only if life has a goal and a purpose. If life has this, then life is indeed worth living.<sup>1</sup>

During this Respect Life Month, we are invited to recognize that “every life is worth living” because every life has a goal and a purpose. The goal of every human life is that each of us has been created to live forever in the glory of Heaven. God has willed, in His love, for each and every life to come into existence and to be with Him in eternity. There is absolutely no human life that is not called to this destiny. Therefore, no life which God has created should be denied the opportunity of sharing in the goal for which he or she has been created.

It is also absolutely true that every life has a unique and special purpose. Just over a week ago, I, and several pilgrims from throughout the diocese, had the privilege of attending the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. One of the keynote speakers during the week was the popular evangelical pastor, Rick Warren. He spoke about some ways in which families could live a joy-filled existence. One of the points that he made was that we need to have our lives built on purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheen, Fulton J. *Life is Worth Living*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953. 15.

He explained that God has never created anything without a purpose. The rocks have been created for a specific purpose. Various trees have been created for a specific purpose. The many animals of the earth have been created for a specific purpose. And at the height of all of His creation, God has created human life, and each life has a specific purpose.

Our society introduces great confusion in this regard, for it looks at things from a practical point of view. We try to determine the purpose of things or people based on our ideas or worth and usefulness. The result is that some people are deemed to be unproductive, unimportant, and therefore, unnecessary. As a result, our government and our society justifies the suppression or even elimination of those people, all because they think those lives serve no useful purpose for the world in which we live.

Warren explained that taking such an approach, trying to look for purpose, beginning with our human way of understanding, is the wrong one. We have to begin with God. We cannot truly know our purpose, or that of any other human life, apart from God, for it was not we who create life, it is always He who is responsible.

In this regard, the Gospel for today's Mass is very fitting. Jesus speaks to the Father saying, "Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike" (Luke 10:21). The so-called wise and the learned of our society would like to think that they can justify their devaluing of human life based on logical principles, but Jesus has revealed to us, the childlike, the truth that sees beyond the surface level into the depths of God's beautiful creation, the beauty of each and every human life created by God. That vision of faith believes without a doubt that every life, without exception, has a purpose in the unfolding of God's wonderful plan for bringing each and every soul to the goal of Heaven.

Our first reading from the Prophet Baruch offers an important perspective in understanding the deeper meaning of God's purpose in His events and the lives of His people. The Lord speaks to His people who had been exiled from their homeland and had experienced many tribulations and suffering. He promises that He will bring them out of this experience of mourning and bring them back to "enduring joy" (Baruch 4:29). He is encouraging the people to look beyond the surface of their present circumstances and to trust in His providential love for His beloved

children. He is able to bring good out of the most unlikely circumstances, to show forth in a greater way the power and depth of His love.

This is the truth we are invited to recognize in the gift of human life and the purpose that each life has. Through those who seem most insignificant or most weak, God shows forth His glory and love in a remarkable way by using them to accomplish His remarkable deeds.

How many women, when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, have been tempted to see their situation from the perspective of the “wise and learned of the world,” who tell them it is no big deal to have an abortion, inviting them to consider just their own selves and see abortion as an easy way out in order to secure their future? Thanks be to God that many of those women have been shown the love of God and have chosen to look at their situation from God’s perspective, trusting that God can and will bring a great good out of their circumstances, especially as they embrace the most sacred gift of human life. Even though it may not be seen initially, God still uses both the woman and the father, as well as the child, to continue to accomplish His loving purpose.

How many women have been told to end their pregnancy because the child in their womb may have a developmental disability and that it

would be the compassionate thing to do, both for the mother and the child not to be subjected to such a difficult life? Yet, how many couples have rejected such lies and welcomed the gift of life and have found the great blessing those children have been, and how their purpose in life has been anything but insignificant? Rather, they have a special purpose of teaching others what unconditional love looks like, and in inviting those around them, to direct their attention away from themselves outward to another, thus showing true compassion, as Jesus has commanded us.

There are so many other examples of how those who are the least among us have a purpose of great value, not the least of which is teaching us how to live less selfishly and more lovingly toward those around us. While I realize that this message is one on which we all agree, it is one that we must ever keep in mind, to live in all of our thoughts, words, and actions, thus inviting others to welcome those truths as well.

We must never cease to be instruments of God's love and mercy to everybody we encounter, especially those who have have lost their sense of purpose or wonder why things have turned out as they have. The Church has to be that place where they can feel welcomed and loved. To use the words of Pope Francis, we need to be a "field hospital" that welcomes

sinners, those who are wounded, those who have been rejected, those who have been forgotten. They should be welcomed with open arms, not fingers pointing in judgment.

As we prepare to receive the Holy Eucharist, let us pray for our hearts to be enflamed with a greater love for the gift of all human life and then to be instruments of spreading that love throughout our society. May we also be instruments of unity in this cause of promoting the dignity of life, for our division is a great source of scandal and has resulted in so much harm. Being ambassadors of love and mercy is at the heart of God's purpose for each of our lives. Let us pray that each of us will live with this purpose in mind, thus building a culture of life and love in which all recognize that "every life is worth living" as we all draw closer to our common goal of eternal life in Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.