

**Homily for Curia Respect Life Mass
October 19, 2016**

**Catholic Pastoral Center
St. Viator Chapel
Springfield**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for our annual Curia Respect Life Mass. During this Year of Mercy, the bishops of the United States have chosen the theme to be: Moved by Mercy. Recognizing the great gift of mercy that has been shown to us by God, we are then called to be moved by that mercy and reach out to those who are in need around us.

Unfortunately, it is all too common in our society to hear stories of violence and hatred, examples of how mercy is rejected. Occasionally, however, we hear of stories that restore our sense of hope by showing the positive effects of mercy at work in our world. One such example came from a story that I heard about recently. Last year, a woman named Christina found out that she was pregnant with her second child. Already faced with many challenges in her life, she decided that the best course of action would be to put her baby up for adoption.

On the day the baby was born, the woman who was planning to adopt the child was present at the hospital for the delivery. When the adoptive mother saw the newborn girl, she broke into tears and ran from the hospital, never to be seen again. The baby, named Abigail, had been born with a genetic condition that causes underdevelopment in facial structures. While we do not know what was going through her mind, this woman was moved by something, but I think it is safe to say that it was not mercy. It is not really fair for us to judge why she decided not to welcome this precious gift of life, but she didn't.

The situation quickly turned from tragic to beautiful as the birth mother decided at that moment that she would take this child and raise her daughter herself. Christina, the mother, said the following about her new baby: "That is when I realized she is meant to be mine only now 'cause of her needs...I was not fully prepared for her, but now I can no longer see my life without either one of my daughters."¹ Unlike the adoptive mother, Christina was moved by mercy and decided to accept Abigail for the gift that she is, a gift that she says "saves my life every single day."²

As our diocese continues our journey forward of stewardship and discipleship as a way of life, we are inspired by the example given by

people such as Christina. Using the words from our Gospel for today, we could say that she was a “faithful and prudent steward” (Luke 12:42). First of all, she was acting with great prudence when she realized that she was not in a position to care for this child in an adequate way. Unlike so many faced with a challenge like hers, she did not resort to having an abortion, but prudently planned for the future of her child by arranging to have her adopted.

When that plan came to an unexpected end, she continued to act faithfully as a steward of the gift with which she had been entrusted. Just like St. Paul in our first reading who recognized that the gift of grace he had received was given for the benefit of others,³ Christina did not think first about herself, she thought about her child and decided that the right thing to do was to fully embrace her role as the mother of this child, a mother who would commit to the stewardship of sharing the gift of her motherhood with her daughter.

This story also highlights another aspect of our stewardship and discipleship way of life. It shows the necessity of putting the pillar of hospitality first. As they began their journey of stewardship in the Diocese of Wichita, the leaders emphasized that even though it might not be the

most important pillar, hospitality has to come first. If people do not feel welcome, it is going to be much more difficult to get them to embrace the other pillars of stewardship.

In the stewardship way of life to which we are all called, it is important for us to be conscious of this pillar of hospitality as a starting point for our efforts. When we were at the Diocesan Respect Life Mass in Granite City earlier this month, I spoke about our approach to those women faced with a difficult pregnancy. It can be tempting to try to go right to the pillar of formation, informing them of the grave mistake that they are making and the moral consequences of their choice to have an abortion.

While it is true that we do indeed need to make people aware of these consequences, we must also recognize that we are dealing with human beings who are often scared and uncertain. This must be taken into account when we find ourselves in these situations. We want to bring them to conversion, but in our present culture, that does not often happen when the person is feeling attacked with the Gospel message.

We can turn to our newly canonized saint, St. Teresa of Calcutta, for the example of how this can be lived out. She spoke on this very topic at

the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. in 1994. She said the following:

How do we persuade a woman not to have an abortion? As always, we must persuade her with love and we remind ourselves that love means to be willing to give until it hurts. Jesus gave even His life to love us. So, the mother who is thinking of abortion, should be helped to love, that is, to give until it hurts her plans, or her free time, to respect the life of her child. The father of that child, whoever he is, must also give until it hurts.⁴

To use the language of the pillars of stewardship, Mother Teresa is inviting us to start with hospitality which comes from a heart that is moved by mercy for others. It is from that entry point that we can lead them to conversion and an understanding of their obligations as stewards of the gift of life.

We see this dynamic in other areas of respect for life. Take for example the issue of assisted suicide. In 2015, 48% of those who died under Oregon's assisted suicide law cited being a "burden" on family, friends, or caregivers as a reason for their suicide.⁵ One who feels that he or she is a burden is one who is surrounded by those whose hearts have

not been moved by mercy at the sight of that person's suffering. As a result, the person has not been shown hospitality and they risk falling into the false belief that their life is not worth living.

By opening the door of hospitality, we make way for the Lord to work in powerful ways in our lives and in the lives of others. Returning to the example of Christina, after she made the courageous decision to accept the responsibility of raising her newborn daughter, many people had their hearts moved by mercy at her selfless example. Family, friends, and local nonprofits helped raise money for her and they provided needed supplies so that she could take care of her new baby.

During this Respect Life Month and as we move forward on this path of stewardship and discipleship, may our hearts always be open to being moved by mercy. May that enable us to practice hospitality generously and lovingly, thus opening the door to let all of God's gifts take root in our lives, to grow, and so bear fruit for the Kingdom of God toward which we as missionary disciples journey together.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Flanders, Nancy. "Baby's birth mother decides to keep her after adoptive mother rejects her." LifeSiteNews.com. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/babys-birth-mother-decides-to-keep-her-after-adoptive-mother-rejects-her> (accessed October 12, 2016).

² *ibid.*

³ Ephesians 3:2.

⁴ Mother Teresa, *Speech of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, DC*, February 3, 1994. www.priestsforlife.org.

⁵ USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, Fact Sheet, "Assisted Suicide Laws in Oregon and Washington: What Safeguards?" www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/to-live-each-day/upload/Oregon-and-Washing-euthanasia-2013.pdf. (accessed October 12, 2016).