

Homily of Archbishop Richard W. Smith

Mass for Life

St. Joseph's Basilica

December 7, 2008

Tonight we gather in our Cathedral to pray for the protection of human life. Of course, the Church works for this protection on many levels. Like all activity, however, if it is not sustained by prayer, it will not succeed. There is no more powerful form of prayer than the Eucharist, because here we are united to the sacrifice of Christ, who gives to the world the fullness of life. Hence we gather in faith, asking the Lord to inspire and strengthen us for this all-important task.

Our celebration this year occurs on the threshold of the important initiative we are about to take up in support of the new evangelization. On Friday of this week we shall enter that five year process of renewal we are calling *Nothing More Beautiful*. These words belong to Pope Benedict, who said, "There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Jesus Christ and to tell others of our friendship in him."

In this first upcoming year of *Nothing More Beautiful*, we shall focus on the beauty of the human person, created by God and saved in Jesus Christ. As the sessions unfold we shall be reminded of fundamental truths concerning our human nature. For our purposes this evening I focus on one, namely, the absolute need of the human being for God. Every human being is truly and radically dependent upon God for life and happiness. I highlight this dimension of human existence because an acceptance of this basic truth is essential if we are to move from the present culture of death here in Canada to a culture of life.

God is Creator; He is the author of life; He is the source of all that is. This means that all that we have and all that we are is gift. As we reflect upon God as source and giver of all that is, and ponder the truth of our "givenness", then we come to realize that, in relation to the material world, and in relation to life itself, we are not owners; we are stewards. A steward is one to whom something is entrusted in order to care for it and nurture it. Acceptance of the truth of our dependence leads inexorably to the realization that what we have and who we are is given to us by God, not as personal possession but in trust.

The greatest gift with which we are entrusted by God is life itself. We are not our own possession, masters of our own destiny. Rather we are God's possession, and the gift of life inserts us into the orbit of His love and places us in the unfolding of God's plan to have us live with Him forever. Human life is a sacred trust because it comes from God and is destined for God. In no way is it to be regarded as subject to human control or manipulation.

Yet the sad truth is that we are seeing the tendency to control and manipulate manifest in many ways: the championing of abortion as a right; the destruction of the embryo in order to appease scientific curiosity and pride; the momentum to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide by those who presume to judge when life is no longer worth living; the wanton destruction of the

environment without concern for future generations; the consumerism and materialism that hinders an equitable distribution of the world's resources. All of these give tragic witness to the mentality which lies at their root, the mentality that views man not as the steward of life but its master.

To these we should add the many ways today in which the very means of reproduction are manipulated and removed from the act of love proper to husband and wife. This year we mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI entitled *Humanae Vitae*. Given that it is 40 years old, there may be many here tonight who have never heard of it. It deals with the regulation of human birth and calls us to be faithful to God's design for marriage and sexuality. This design holds together the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act in the context of marriage. At the time of its release *Humanae Vitae* generated much controversy. Now it is increasingly recognized as a prophetic document. The Pope told us that failure to respect God's design for marriage and sexuality, apart from being wrong in itself, will lead inevitably to a host of societal problems. Present experience manifests the truth of his teaching. The immediate issue treated by *Humanae Vitae* was artificial contraception. Now we witness such new biotechnologies as in vitro fertilization, sperm donation, egg freezing, the use of frozen embryos, third party reproduction, and pre-implantation genetic screening. At issue in these practices is ultimately the inherent dignity of the human person. Such dignity demands that the origin of human life spring from the personal act of spousal love within marriage and not be subject to the domination of impersonal technology.

To break away from the faulty and ultimately deadly illusion of mastery, humanity must learn to accept the truth of its dependence upon God and consequent call to be stewards of life.

For this acceptance to happen, we need to acknowledge the necessity of divine revelation for a full understanding of the human being. By ignoring revelation, the modern mind is unaware of the truth of our dependence and adopts the illusion of self-sufficiency. This, in turn, gives rise to the lethal mindset of control. This deficient and myopic view of human nature is resulting not in respect for life but in its destruction.

The revelation we need has been given to us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word of God, made flesh. In his incarnate mystery we see revealed not only the truth of God but also the truth of every human being; the truth that each and every person is created by God and ordered to an eternal destiny, that the right to life with which each human being is endowed is therefore inalienable, and that every man, woman and child is invested with a God-given dignity that simply must not be violated.

Only in Jesus Christ is the full truth of human nature known. Only by embracing his revelation will humanity come to accept the truth of its dependence upon God and the call to stewardship of all God's gifts, in particular the gift of life itself. Clearly, the need for a new evangelization remains urgent. As Pope Benedict constantly reminds us, in the circumstances of our day this evangelization must take the form of a joyful proclamation of the love of God, the love of God which embraces every human being and gives their life true meaning and purpose.

Like John the Baptist, whose mission was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, we often find ourselves proclaiming the Gospel of Life in the wilderness. But the desert in which we speak is not the dry waterless land of the Middle East; rather it is the arid and parched soul that has lost

touch with the beauty of God and the wonder of human life revealed in Jesus Christ. It is in this wilderness that we are called to speak, and we must do so with joy and conviction. Discouraging results or lack of response should not deter us. St. Peter reminds us tonight that God's will unfolds and is accomplished in God's time, not ours. Our responsibility is to be faithful to the call that is ours in the present, and to trust that God will turn all to the good in accordance with his saving purpose. Tonight let us offer this Eucharist for the intention that our joyful annunciation of the love of God will help all people to embrace the truth of human existence, and thus accord it due honour, respect and protection at every stage and in every circumstance.