



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily
Thursday, May 14, 2020

Mass to celebrate the dignity of human life (bilingual homily) Jn 15, 9-17

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Jesus tells us: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

On this day of the March for Life, we also pray and celebrate the Eucharist for life, as we do each year.

This day is an opportunity to renew our commitment to the dignity of life from conception to natural death. At the same time, this day is an opportunity to renew our faith and entrust life to the one who is the origin of all life: Jesus Christ, who came to save our lives, and to God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the origin of life.

For many years, a large number of men and women have literally given their lives to the service of life. Through their actions, they bear witness to and promote the dignity of the weakest, the smallest and the most fragile, children in their mother’s womb and the sick and the elderly who are approaching the end of their life. In serving, they best promote the dignity of the life of each person. Those who consecrate their life to the dignity of each human being work at the same time to proclaim and promote the dignity of each human being and each person.

Today, we pray for those who devote themselves to the cause of life and the dignity of each human being, wherever they are on this planet, in this country, in our province or in our town. At the same time, in this current time of vulnerability, we can place ourselves with renewed faith into the hands of God.

Today, we celebrate the Apostle Saint Matthias, the twelfth apostle whom the other apostles had chosen to replace Judas. In choosing him, they combined faith in human actions with faith in God.

First, they identified two disciples who accompanied Jesus from the beginning until his death on the cross and who bore witness to his resurrection. We can think of this part of the participation of human action in the choosing of St. Matthias.

Then they casted lots to determine who of the two would be the new apostle, the twelfth apostle, and this part of the decision represents the presence of God in their choice!

In a similar way, in order to promote respect for life, we organize several activities. For example, with this March for Life, forums for reflection, workshops, or conferences, we take the opportunity to promote and defend the dignity of the life of each person. At the same time, we entrust all these activities to God to whom we desire to give what is his due.

The first defender of life is God. When Jesus Christ gave his life on the Cross, what did he want to affirm? He affirmed the dignity of the life of every human being. On the cross, Jesus Christ gave his life for every human being, in all places and at all times. In this way, he affirmed not

only his love for every human being, but he affirmed equally the divine love for them and the mercy of God for each person. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed that the dignity of every human being is fundamental, as they are created in the image of God and are called to eternal life.

In this March for Life, we want to pray for and express our gratitude to all those who consecrated themselves to the defense of the dignity of the life of each person, of the Dignity of Life. We also pray that God be at work in the service of life and that God may touch hearts!

In the end, the proclamation of the Good News about life, the Gospel of Life, the proclamation of the Good News of the dignity of every human being, every human being no matter its weakness is the work of evangelization. It is inseparable from the work of evangelization. It is a work of evangelization in which we can proclaim who is the Lord of Life, while at the same time we also proclaim where we proclaim the dignity of life, the dignity of every life. Evangelizing in this way is a profoundly spiritual work.

By our prayer, by entrusting to God our intentions concerning life and this respect for life, we unite our works with the work of Jesus Christ, who is at work in our hearts. For this promotion of the dignity of life to be possible, it requires not only men and women of all ages to speak or testify in the service of life, but it also needs God who acts in the heart of each human being.

The work of evangelization is the work of God who keeps in us the spirit of conversion thanks to someone who proclaims for us the name of Jesus. But before all else, it is the Holy Spirit at work in our heart that makes us hold on to the name of Jesus.

Each time we gather in the name of Jesus, each time we desire to follow in his footsteps after hearing his name, it is the Holy Spirit at work in us. If it were only about the proclamation of the Word, then this Word would suffice. But at the same time, God wants to act in us so that he works through us in the proclamation of this Word.

When God invites us to proclaim the Word, the Good News of the dignity of life at any age, he is at the same time active in the hearts of all people so that the dignity of life resounds in them. Without this divine action in peoples' hearts, there would be no real transmission of the Gospel of Life from one to the other. God's action in our hearts is necessary to change them profoundly.

Praying for life is to ask the Lord to enlighten our hearts so that we will always be faithful servants of life. At the same time, we pray for all humanity and for everyone that this Good News of life is heard by all. By the intercession of the Holy Spirit, may the Good News of life resonate in the hearts of all men and women in our time.

We undertake this March for Life during a pandemic in which human life is at risk. One of the pandemic's aspects is to show us our fragility, our human vulnerability in the church and in society.

In the end, when this storm of COVID-19 passes, what will be left on this planet, what will we hold in our hands?

In a mysterious way, in a certain sense, individuals and their dignity are shaken in their foundation now that they or their families are required to stay at home. But God is always our protection. Only God has the power to be near any human being, across the greatness of the earth, the whole planet, and God is at work. God protects us. God enlightens us. God guides us. God gives us peace.

With the March for Life and the Eucharist taking place online, we might think that our actions are less important than in past years, as we are physically limited in our actions.

On the contrary, without having wanted it or having sought it and even if apparently limited in our capacity to organize and show our strength, we were forced to renew our awareness that it is God himself who saves, that it is God who is at work. The first evangelizer and the first to

proclaim the Gospel of Life is Jesus Christ himself, with the Holy Spirit, who touches hearts and lets them hold on to the name of Jesus Christ and the name of life in the heart of each person.

Let us take the necessary time to make this time a time of prayer, a strong time of prayer. During this pandemic, Pope Francis invites the entire Catholic Church to offer this day as a day of prayer, of fasting, for works of charity, for the intention of the protection of all humanity and the fight against COVID-19.

May this day strengthen in us the desire to work without ceasing for the promotion of solidarity, in support of frontline workers in the pandemic who are putting their lives at risk. Let us be in equal solidarity with all families that are affected by the pandemic because one of the is sick or has died because of COVID-19.

Let us also remember that we can make this time of suffering remind us of the message of the March for Life and proclaim the primacy of life and the dignity of every human being, while at the same time being attentive to the needs of all humanity.

Let us take the time to fast today, as the church recommends, as fasting is like praying with your whole body. Fasting is like saying: "Lord, we could have it all, but if we do not have you, if we cannot feel your presence, then nothing matters. If we cannot contemplate your works, we miss what is essential, we miss your love and your presence."

On this day of fasting, let us pray with our body. Let us entrust the cause of respect for life into the hands of God.

In spite of our limited means during the online March for Life, let us take the time for acts of charity of outreach to those who may be isolated at this time.

At the same time, let us equally take the time to entrust all of humanity and our society to the love of God, to his presence, to the love of Jesus Christ who gave his life on the Cross for each and every one of us.

One of the aspects that we are more and more conscience of is one we've already known. But it became more obvious, more and more obvious. It is that there's a link between the value of life and the value of spiritual life. Without spiritual life it becomes very difficult to be open to the value of life.

And as we are rediscovering through this pandemic, the value of spiritual life is like at the bottom of the scale! And maybe we can pray that all of humanity, our societies, our countries, our families, that we rediscover the value of spiritual life, the importance of spiritual life, and I (would like) to say the primacy of spiritual life because we exist body and soul.

When someone says 'I', this 'I' takes its center in the soul, in the spirit, in the heart. It expresses itself body and soul. But takes its center is in the soul. So the rediscovery of the spiritual life is very important. It's a necessity. It certainly can be something we try to rediscover for ourselves in our own personal life, for our families.

Especially one way to grow through this pandemic would be to grow in the rediscovery of the family as a domestic church. There's a classic expression: a family that prays together, stays together. But the family is called to pray. The family is the work of God, comes from God. It is God who invented the family.

And certainly, the family is called to be, is a cell of society. No family, no society! Life comes from the family. And at the same time, no family, no Church! Life comes from the family. The first transmission of faith is within the family! It is the parents who present their child to the Church for baptism.

Rediscovering the value of spiritual life, the primacy of spiritual life, is a task that is ahead of us. But at the same time, we can work on it right now! We've been doing it for many years, for a long time! But this pandemic manifests to us that we need to renew our prayers and our efforts.

I will invoke for you a prayer that is based on Mother Genevieve Micheli and it puts together all those aspects of the value of life, the value of spiritual life:

“We are living at a time that is both disturbing and amazing; a time that is dangerous and where nothing preserves the soul. As members of faith communities, being aware of the true value of the spiritual life, we carry a great responsibility and we must live up to it. Together, we must help each other to create places of refuge for spiritual peace. We come together today, on the 14th of May 2020, on this day of prayer, fasting and charitable works in order to implore God to preserve the world, to help us to overcome this pandemic, to restore security, health and prosperity. Together we pray that once the pandemic is over, humanity may come to know the true value of spiritual life, to grant a larger place to brotherhood and to protect life and creation.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal