

## 100211 THERE ARE MANY LIFE ISSUES

(Each year the first Sunday in October is designated as Respect Life Sunday and homilists are asked to preach on the various life themes.)

Parishes are very interesting places. Each parish has its own unique charism and atmosphere. I love being here at Saint Anthony's and the charism and atmosphere of our parish. As Pastor you do, over time, really get to see it all. Parishes are mixed bags, filled with people of all kinds. Some of those parishioners are mature and have their act together; some are immature and do not. There are parishioners who used to believe and used to come who no longer believe or no longer come. There are parishioners who left the faith years ago and now have found their way back and are involved in this community's life. There are some who have lived a good life and never really done anything terribly wrong. There are others who have sinned grievously and more than once and in more than one area.

Today is Respect Life Sunday when our faith, our Church bids us look at all the life issues and find Christ's way in each. Oftentimes the preacher will focus on the most severe of the life issues, abortion. The reason is that the unborn are being destroyed and they are unable to speak for themselves. They are truly defenseless. They deserve a spokesman. They need to be spoken for. And so the preacher steps up. But Respect Life Sunday is not simply about abortion.

We have all come to know that there are truly evil people out there, some of whom are trying to destroy us and what they think we stand for. Our Government is going after them to stop them, even to kill them, in order to prevent a repeat of past terror attacks. We send drones to kill them. Just this week there were reports of successful drone attacks that killed several prominent terrorists. While the killing may be warranted and in many a heart we think, "Better them than us," we must ask ourselves whether it really is necessary for us to rejoice and celebrate their deaths. Is that really what we learned when we put on Christ? For, Respect Life Sunday is not about being an American but about being a follower of Jesus Christ and having his mind in us. Did it even enter into our minds to say a prayer for those killed and place them in the hands of God as misguided as they were? And what about what we so blithely call "collateral damage" meaning the innocent civilians who were also killed in the explosion simply because they were nearby? Is it fine if it happens over there but not so fine if it happens next door to me? Remember Jesus directive to "Love your enemies and pray for those who hurt you." That is his mind. It was evident in his own death on the cross ("Father, forgive them..."). Did we ever think to pray to God that any of them would undergo a real change of heart?

Or is it just about the killing? Do you know that we have had parishioners do hard prison time for embezzling and stealing and for multiple DUI's that endangered people's lives? Do you know that we have had parishioners deported because they entered this country illegally? They prayed in these pews with you. And I am not talking about Mexico but Italy and Ireland. I have written letters on their behalf that they not be deported and that they be allowed back in this country. I am not talking about men here. I am talking about women—wives, mothers. We have some illegals in the parish right now. They look just like you or me. "Send 'em back!" we say. "Get rid of 'em," we say. But do we remember when Joseph and Mary and Jesus fled into Egypt to escape Herod's deadly game? With papers and permission—or without?

What about Capital Punishment? "They deserve to die, to forfeit their lives, for what they did." That's how we talk and think. But I will tell you what changed my mind on capital punishment. It was Jesus on the crucifix. He was put to death by the capital punishment of the government of Rome, the very One whom we call Lord and Savior. Was he guilty or innocent? Yes, sometimes innocent people are put to death because some thought them guilty. Mike Cuff who read at Mass today corresponds with prisoners and one is on Death Row but claims he is innocent. Everyone in prison claims to be innocent. Who can tell? Precisely my point. Who can tell save God alone? Then why do we not leave up to God to deal with the guilt and punishment. We don't always know but we tend to think we know and we believe we know who should be punished and how. Why not simply lock the person away so that they cannot harm anyone else. I have seen and experienced death bed conversions which might not have taken place if the life of the person had been suddenly cut short, if they did not get their full, allotted amount of time by God. It doesn't mean that bad things were not done. It just means that we have to be careful about taking the life of the convicted. God alone sees truly; we do not. And whether we like it or not, God is always interested in the change of heart and the sorrow that unleashes his forgiveness.

What is the vineyard in the two scriptural accounts today? Or rather, who? It is you—and me. We are the vineyard with all we've been given, our endowments, our talents, abilities, attitudes. How are you using all you have been given? Not from your own perspective but from the Lord's. How are you giving back—to God, to your neighbor? Where are you holding back? We have to ask ourselves if we have really put on the mind of Christ.

There is a bluntness and hardness in God's word today. The message is short and clear. Use what you have been given to make a return for all you have been given, or risk losing—all of it. The good news today isn't easy; it is challenging. Sometimes the Lord afflicts the comfortable especially when we become comfortable with a viewpoint not his own.