

Column100420

Companions on the Journey

October 4, 2020

Dear Friends,

This weekend is Respect Life weekend. The word “respect” has an interesting etymology. It comes from the Latin *re*-again + *spicio*-I see. If I *respicio* someone or something it means I look at the thing or the person again, a second time or even over and over. The connotation is that in the looking again I begin to see what I did not fully or completely see the first time I glanced. I come now to regard what I am seeing in a new way, with a deeper appreciation with, in other words, respect.

The month of October is designated as Respect Life month. Thirty-one days, four and a half weeks, to spend in reflection and re-assessing life in all of its dimensions. All of my columns this month will be on Respect Life themes in leading up to our national election.

The initial and most important dimension is the gift and reality of life itself. Who gets to live? Who forfeits their life? Who decides? In the history of our Constitution and our Declaration of Independence, the Right to Life is enshrined. But over the two hundred and forty-four years there have been many questions about which persons are included in this Right. Does it include people of color? Well, for a time it did not. But then it did. There was a Supreme Court decision that affirmed the right to life included all citizens, regardless of their race or ethnicity. There was another look taken and a new respect established.

How about women? Why yes, of course. But then, women could not vote so actually they weren't really included. But then that too was changed. The right to vote for women was the enfranchisement of women in this country. There was another look taken and a new respect recognized and established.

Each time the question was raised about how far this Right to Life extended the Supreme Court took an inclusive and expansive interpretation. Then there was yet another group about whom there were questions. How about little ones, but real little ones, those not yet born but living in their mother's womb? Until 1973 there was a presumption in Law that even the unborn had a right to life and were included in the protections of our Constitution. But then there was a Supreme Court decision. And for the first time the inclusion ended. The expansive interpretation was negated. No. The protection does not extend to the unborn. There is no protection in this Constitution for you. No. Instead suddenly there was a right to privacy which was never mentioned in our foundational documents. This newly established right to privacy held sway over even the right to life of the child in utero.

Who lives? Who forfeits his life? Who decides? Those same three questions now get different answers. Perhaps the child in the womb. But it will be the woman alone who decides. And if she says, “No” then it is the child who forfeits her life. So, forty-seven years later, in this country alone, there have been 61,000,000 abortions. Let's say that represents 45,000,000 women with an abortion in their past life.

I have no real idea what the making of such a decision is like. No real idea of the fear and the pain and the shame and the anger or the mixed feeling of relief. No idea of all those men whose sexual intimacy helped to conceive all these little ones, but who then turned away, denied, walked away or laughed about the predicament they had helped create. Or even worse pressured the woman to end the pregnancy whether she wanted the child or not. Or even paid for the abortion and then disappeared.

My friends, do you see any respect here? In this last scenario? No, there is only disrespect—in large measures. All around. For the child, the woman and the man. This is not our Court's finest decision, “liberating women from the yoke on their shoulders.” This is another disrespect foisted on to the woman. She has to carry the burden. She has to decide. She has to carry the reality and the aftermath. Let me guess, the first abortionists were all men. The majority of Justices who voted for the right of privacy were almost all men. There is a lie at the root of this Court decision. No foundation in truth. It is built on sand. We know how this will end. Sooner or later. We cannot abort 61,000,000 babies and somehow call it a good thing, a moment of genuine enlightenment and true freedom. I mean no disrespect to anyone. But we cannot call this a good thing. Ever.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry