



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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“Every Life is Worth Living” Reflections for Respect Life Month, October 2015

My dear friends in Christ:

One of the deepest desires of the human heart is to discover our identity. So often, as a society and as individuals, we identify ourselves by what we do. We base our worth on how productive we are at work or at home, and we determine our lives to be more or less good depending on the degree of independence or pleasure. We may even begin to believe that if our lives, or those of others, don't “measure up” to a certain standard, they are somehow less valuable or less worth living.

Respect Life Month is a fitting time to reflect on the truth of who we are.

Our worth is based not on our skills or levels of productivity. Rather, we discover our worth when we discover our true identity found in the unchangeable, permanent fact that we are created in God's image and likeness and called to an eternal destiny with him.

Because of this, absolutely nothing can diminish our God-given dignity, and therefore, nothing can diminish the immeasurable worth of our lives. Others may fail to respect that dignity—may even try to undermine it—but in doing so, they only distance themselves from God's loving embrace. Human dignity is forever.

Whether it lasts for a brief moment or for a hundred years, each of our lives is a good and perfect gift. At every stage and in every circumstance, we are held in existence by God's love.

An elderly man whose health is quickly deteriorating; an unborn baby girl whose diagnosis indicates she may not live long; a little boy with Down syndrome; a mother facing terminal cancer—each may have great difficulties and need our assistance, but each of their lives is worth living.

When we encounter the suffering of another, let us reach out and embrace them in love, allowing God to work through us. This might mean slowing down and taking the time to listen. It might mean providing respite care or preparing meals for a family facing serious illness. It might mean simply being present and available. And of course, it always means prayer--bringing their needs before the Father and asking him to work in their lives.

Experiencing suffering—or watching another suffer—is one of the hardest human experiences. Fear of the unknown can lead us into the temptation of taking control in ways that offend our dignity and disregard the reverence due to each person.

But we are not alone. Christ experienced suffering more deeply than we can comprehend, and our own suffering can be meaningful when we unite it with his. Especially in the midst of

trials, we are invited to hold fast to the hope of the Resurrection. God is with us every step of the way, giving us the grace we need.

In times of suffering, let us have the courage to accept help that others genuinely want to give, and give the help that others need. We were made to love and be loved; we are meant to depend on one another, serving each other in humility and walking together in times of suffering. Our relationships are meant to help us grow in perfect love.

Let us learn to let go of our own standards of perfection and instead learn more deeply how to live according to God's standards. He does not call us to perfect efficiency or material success; he calls us to self-sacrificial love. He invites us to embrace each life for as long as it is given—our own lives and the lives of those he has placed in our paths. Every life is worth living.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seán P. O'Malley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Boston
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities
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