Abide in Christ

Life is the Most Fundamental Wonderment of All

In last month's issue, I told you about my plan for these several issues: “The Mystery of the Moral Life.” It strikes me that the gift of religious wonder is a unique facet of life and that our religious language, the language of faith, plays a critical role in pondering life's mysteries. In this issue, I would like to share with you some thoughts on a profound reality that is critical to us all: the sanctity of human life. Some people may decide to read no further, others will assume to know what to expect and simply ignore the issues; but to do so misses the real point of why we are here – life is the most fundamental wonderment of all.

Scientist are searching into remote galaxies to see if life exists on other planets. Given the billions of galaxies, this quest for life beyond our solar system has surfaced numerous earth-like planets with names like 1140b, GJ1132b, GJ1214b. But the one that stands out is in the constellation Aquarius, 39 light years from Earth, called TRAPPIST-1, so named because the Belgian scientist toasted its discovery drinking beer brewed by Trappist monks. This wonderful curiosity about the possibility of life on planets light years away underscores the uniqueness of life as we know it here on our planet. But there is something more this tells us, that life as we know it here on Earth is something rare and sacred and holy. This is a core truth to women and men of faith, to those who in serving the needs of “the least of these brothers and sisters” come to discover they serve the God who made them (Matthew 25:40). The encyclical “The Gospel of Life” powerfully tells us, “Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church's very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature” (St. John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, no. 3). This is why the Church is so pronounced in preaching the message of human dignity, of the holiness of human life, and the interconnectedness of all creation. We cannot ignore the lesson of life that only faith can tell, that only religious language has words to explore. The conditions for life on remote planets demands a delicate balance of numerous factors and it is no less true here at home. We cannot compartmentalize and cut into segments the miracle of life. Every sign of life, every mysterious moment from conception to birth to falling in love to our building community and ultimately to death itself is a rarefied atmosphere that women and men of faith are called to preserve, to cherish and nurture. So many people, I fear, fail to appreciate this truth: When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.

These are not new words. Genesis 1:26-31, from the start shows that human life is fashioned in the image of God; One who fashioned us from our inmost being (Psalms 139:13-16); it is God who loves the widow, the orphan and the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:17-19); St. Paul exhorts us to look after the needs of one another (Romans 12: 9-18); and James tells us to honor the poor (James 2:1-8); or John, who tells us to love one another “because God is love” (1 John 4:7-12). So when Pope Francis tells us in Laudato si, When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected (117) he is more clearly asserting the delicate environment that is needed for human flourishing, for genuine human dignity. Our reverence for creation must be constant and manifested in every moment of human life, but especially in the most vulnerable, those who cannot defend themselves – from the unborn child in the womb to the abandoned teen in
our streets, from the person with special needs to the sick and those nearing death, life is too precious, too unique, to be discarded.

In May of this year, Pope Francis spoke to an international gathering of women and men on the theme: “Yes to Life! — To Take Care of the Precious Gift of Life in Fragility”. In his comments he stated: “However, no human being can ever be incompatible with life, not due to his age, his health conditions, or the quality of his existence. Every child that enters a woman’s womb is a gift, which changes the story of a family: of a father and a mother, of grandparents and siblings. And this baby is in need of being received, loved and taken care of” (Yes to Life!) [link for document http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190525_yes-to-life.html]. Imagine our scientist in the future who realize that staring back at them in wonder is a life not unlike our own. Would they not want to care? Would they not see the dignity of their shared existence? I know that I am not alone in asking if we as a society have begun to forget the rare and precious life form that exists here on earth, in our brothers and sisters? This is why we all must, each in our own way, proclaim the dignity of human life. We are blessed here in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe with many organizations and individuals who care for the fragile dignity of humanity. For example, Catholic Charities with its outreach to so many in need; parish food drives and their care for the destitute; CHI St. Joseph’s Children with their work for the poor, the alienated, and the underserving; the healing of peoples’ lives done by Samaritan Counseling Center; those who advocate for the unborn in prayer, dialogue and witness to the gift of life; St. Felix Pantry; Villa Teresa Clinic, and Casa Angelica who show special care for children and young adults with disabilities. One cannot look into the faces of these, our brothers and sisters, and not discover the precious, unique sacred dignity of human life. I invite each of us this month to foster the dignity and sanctity of human life. Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Poor and our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, may we discover the full dignity of human life, here, in the hearts of one another.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,

Most Rev. John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe