

HOMILY HELPS FOR RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time *October 4, 2020*

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons highlight the Gospel of life by unpacking the 2020-2021 Respect Life theme (“Live the Gospel of Life”) within the context of the Lectionary readings for Respect Life Sunday (October 4, 2020). These notes can be used piecemeal or comprehensively. Other ministry leaders can also use these notes in other settings, such as Bible studies, small groups, or other faith formation or ministry settings.

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time **Respect Life Sunday | October 4, 2020**

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

Gospel Acclamation: cf. John 15:16

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

Readings: bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/100420.cfm

- In the Lectionary readings, we are presented with the recurrent theme of the vineyard, which is used to symbolize the people of God. As members of the Church, we are part of the Lord’s vineyard.
- The First Reading from Isaiah describes how the vineyard owner (God) cared for his vineyard (Israel), doing everything he could to help it grow and flourish in his love: *My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; / he spaded it, cleared it of stones, / and planted the choicest vines.* The people symbolized by God’s vineyard are his *cherished plant*. But despite this loving care, the vineyard only produces *wild grapes* (sin).
- Like the owner who took such great care in the creation and cultivation of his vineyard, God loved each of us into existence and continues caring for us, inviting us ever deeper into his friendship. We draw closer to him when we follow his example and love one another as he loves us.
- But, all too often, we fail to treat one another according to the dignity with which he made us. When we don’t follow God, and instead turn away from him, we produce the *wild grapes* of sin.
- Yet, as the Psalmist reminds Israel of its need for salvation and repentance, we are reminded that we belong to God, and that mercy and healing is always possible. The Psalmist recalls God’s tender love and care: *A vine from Egypt you transplanted; / you*

drove away the nations and planted it. The Psalmist seeks God's protection: Once again, O LORD of hosts, / look down from heaven, and see; / take care of this vine, / and protect what your right hand has planted. And finally, the Psalmist promises a return to God: Then we will no more withdraw from you; / give us new life, and we will call upon your name. / O LORD, God of hosts, restore us; / if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.

- Similarly, the Lord invites us to seek forgiveness whenever we turn from him, and to receive his tender mercy. He wants to *give us new life*.
- The Second Reading tells us that, as God's people, we are called to seek what is *true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious*, so that we can be the *choicest vines*, producing an abundant harvest. One of the ways we do this is by loving one another as Christ loves us, especially by caring for those who are most in need.
- October is Respect Life Month, and today (October 4) is Respect Life Sunday. Each year at this time, the bishops of the United States call us to pause and reflect more deeply on the sacred gift of human life and our role in welcoming, cherishing, and protecting the lives of our brothers and sisters.
- This year we're also celebrating the 25th anniversary of Pope Saint John Paul II's encyclical *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium vitae)*. Our Holy Father wrote this document to reaffirm and present the Church's joyful teaching on human life within the context of modern times, and it remains relevant today. This year's theme is appropriately, "Live the Gospel of Life."
- What does it mean to live the Gospel of life? In his earthly life, Jesus provided the perfect model for how we are to love our neighbor and live out the Gospel call: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40). In other words, as Saint John Paul II reminds us, Jesus calls each of us to "care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible" (EV 87).
- Some of those who most need of our care and attention are those whose lives are treated as if they don't matter. Sadly, human life often faces particular threats at its beginning and end—precisely when it is most in need of protection. For example, practices such as abortion and assisted suicide tragically reject the truth that human life is always to be cherished and defended with loving concern.
- Let us recall the words of today's Gospel acclamation: *I have chosen you from the world, says the Lord, to go and bear fruit that will remain*. We must persevere and work to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves or who feel as if their lives are not worth living.
- What can we do? How do we respond? Here are some questions we can ask ourselves... *Do I help pregnant and parenting mothers in my community who need a shoulder to lean on or a helping hand? Do I know how to support a loved one nearing death in a way that*

respects the gift of his or her life? Do I inform myself of the Church's teachings and engage in the civic arena as first a follower of Christ? Do I support and advocate for laws and policies that protect and defend human life?

- In our efforts to follow the Lord and bear good fruit, there may be times when it is difficult. It may feel like the vineyard has been neglected, trampled, and laid to waste. But we can find strength and comfort in knowing the Lord has not abandoned us. The keeper of the vineyard has not forgotten his *cherished plant* (*First Reading*).
- Today's Gospel demonstrates God's faithfulness. God sent his own Son for the sake of our redemption. Jesus gave his own life in order for us to be able to be with him. How else can we respond, except with love for the one who has loved us so much? Let us be encouraged to labor in the vineyard, trusting that the Lord will bring forth good fruit.
- During this Respect Life Month, ask Jesus how he is specifically calling *you* to follow in his footsteps. How is he calling you to care for the lives of your neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable? Let us continue, *by prayer and petition*, to *make our requests known to God* (*Second Reading*). As the Second Reading encourages us: *Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me*. Let us ask the Lord for an outpouring of grace, especially the graces of wisdom, humility, and courage, as well as open and generous hearts, that we may respond to his call to Live the Gospel of life.

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