Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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27th Sunday Ordinary Time
Walk With Christ for Life
St. Mary’s Cathedral, Fargo

“These words of Jesus are the perfect headline for our celebration today of Respect Life Sunday.

These last weeks have been filled with political maneuvering and conflict over a Supreme Court nominee, and many are speculating about what this will mean for abortion in our country. Will Roe v. Wade be overturned? Will abortion rights be threatened? Will the right to life finally be restored? None of us can know the answers to these questions, at least not yet. But I would suggest that, whatever happens on the legal front, we must first be concerned about the spiritual and the moral front. Laws might come and go, and I hope our laws will change to respect the sanctity of life. But what is needed first is a change of heart across our entire nation. We can’t hope to bring about a different legal culture unless we first bring about a culture of life, one that reaches every corner and every heart in our nation.

There might be some who say the Church has no business talking about the sacredness of life, and that we shouldn’t be telling others how to live their lives. After all, they will say, the Church has sinners too, and how credible can she be with everything that’s going on? Yes, the Church has sinners too. In fact, the Church is made up of sinners, from top to bottom. But that won’t stop us from declaring what we know to be true: that every life is sacred, that no life is expendable, that all human lives deserve protection and love.

God does not make some lives less worthy than others, even if they are tiny and defenseless, or even if they are disabled or imperfect, what our society would call “unproductive.” We were all tiny and vulnerable at some point, and a time will come when we will be elderly and weak. But that does not change the value of life itself. Life is beautiful in itself apart from someone’s arbitrary measure of quality or burden. When one’s life becomes burdensome, they need love, not a quick pathway towards death. The kneejerk response of our culture is to get someone out of the way if they are judged to be inconvenient, but Jesus embraces those who are little, or inconvenient, or less than perfect. Just as he embraced the children in today’s gospel, now he embraces those who are least important in the eyes of the world.

Yes, abortion is still legal in all fifty states. And the march toward euthanasia is quickening; more states are wrongly considering this an act of mercy. Life is treated as something expendable, something we can take or cast aside as we wish, rather than as the gift of God that it truly is. The gift of life is precious, and Jesus manifests this through his love of children, the sick, the poor, the disabled. He is the Lord of life, but he is also the Son of Man who accepted this human nature of ours so he could be one with us forever. How could he not love the life that he came to share, the life that he has made his own?

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be apostles of life, those he sends out into the world to proclaim the beauty and the sacredness of every human life. And this is not merely a matter of words, of saying with my lips that I am pro-life. It requires prayer and witness and action as well. And this is why we are here today. In a short time, we will give witness to the sacredness of life through our Eucharistic procession. We will bring our Eucharistic Lord to the place where his littlest ones are most threatened, where his love and mercy are most needed. In a place where life is taken and discarded, our crucified and risen Lord will come with his own life-giving grace. And we will pray for the conversion of all who are unable to see the dignity of every life, especially those who would end a life. We will pray for parents who are struggling, and we will pray for babies whose lives are at risk. We will pray for the elderly whose lives are fragile, and the lonely who feel alone in the world. By our prayer and our presence, we will give
witness in our community to Jesus who said, “Let the children come to me…for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Our reverence for life can take other forms as well. Just as Jesus had compassion for the poor and the broken of this world, so must we. As his apostles of life, he asks us to go out and offer his compassion to anyone in need. Perhaps that means supporting a single mother, or visiting a lonely neighbor, or consoling a dying friend, or offering help to a complete stranger. And of course, it should mean that we use the power at our disposal to influence the laws of our land. By our votes for life and through our civic involvement, we can move our community, our state, and our nation closer to the culture of life that Jesus desires. There are many worthy causes out there, but none is more worthy than the sacred right to life, a right that comes from God and that no one can take. We can be the yeast that leavens the entire loaf, that brings forth life from within.

We should always remember too that Jesus is rich in mercy and reckless with forgiveness. To those who have experienced the sadness of abortion in their lives, forgiveness is possible and healing awaits you. If we know of someone who has been touched by abortion or any other assault on life, let us point them toward Christ and his Church. He desires nothing more than to reconcile us with his Father and to share his life with us.

My friends, as we celebrate this Mass, and as we walk with Christ today, let us recommit ourselves to pray and witness and work for life. May Christ, who came that we may have life, restore in our midst a culture a life, the Kingdom of God where all life is revered as a gift from God.