Dear friends, today is Respect Life Sunday, a day to reflect on the gift of life and to renew our commitment to reverence and protection for the sacredness of every human life. In today’s gospel, our Lord tells a challenging parable of a landowner who entrusts his vineyard to his tenants. But those tenants betrayed their master. They took the lives of the servants he sent, even the life of his own son, and they brought ruin to the vineyard and to themselves. Because they had no reverence for the gift they had received and for the lives of those sent by their master, they lost everything that had been given to them.

I can’t help thinking there is a parallel with the world we live in today. God has entrusted us with so many gifts, first of all with the gift of life. And how have we treated those gifts? What have we done to care for those lives that intersect with ours? I don’t need to tell you that we as a nation and a culture often fall short in our respect for life: the lives of the poor, the elderly, the sick and dying, and especially the lives of the unborn. Jesus has entrusted his Kingdom to us, and that Kingdom includes the weak and the vulnerable. Now he calls us to cherish them, to protect them, and to love them. And he comes to us himself, because God can bring life out of death.

I recently read about a TV movie called “Unpregnant” that was produced for HBO. The basic storyline is about a teenage girl who becomes pregnant and can’t get an abortion in her hometown. So she and a friend make a road trip to a faraway town where she can get an abortion, and the whole film is about the crazy hijinks of these two young women. The producer of the movie said it is meant to bring some laughter to the serious subject of abortion. But the trouble is, abortion isn’t funny, ever. Abortion isn’t something to take lightly, and it’s nothing to laugh about. The message of the movie is that abortion is no big deal, but it is a big deal. Abortion takes the life of a child. Abortion ends the life of a child. In any other storyline, that would be tragic and even horrific for those involved. No one with any sense would try to make a comedy about such an event.

Our society and the culture of death is trying harder and harder to make us think that abortion is just another choice that sometimes has to be made. I know the women who choose abortion are often desperate and feel they have no alternative. I can’t imagine what that must be like, and I don’t condemn them. But we are here today, dear friends, to make something clear: abortion is a tragedy every single time it happens, and it should never happen. A child is an unrepeatable treasure, and is never expendable, never just a choice. And the ending of a child’s life is always a terrible loss, not the material for a comedy routine. We come together today to pray and to give witness to the indisputable fact that abortion ends the life of a child, a child of God. We mourn for that loss, and we pray that it would never happen again.

Today after Mass, we will walk in prayer to the sad place right here in our community where abortions are performed. And we will be walking with our Eucharistic Lord, who did not hesitate to walk to Calvary and enter the place of death so that life could be restored. Like the
son in today’s parable, he is sent by his Father to bring mercy and healing where there is death and despair. The presence of our Lord, even at a place where abortions occur, is a sign that God can bring light and life even to the darkest and most hopeless places. So even if you can’t join today’s procession, let us all pray earnestly for a conversion of hearts, starting with our own. Let us pray that the culture of death would be banished from our midst and transformed into a culture of life. Let us pray that every human life, especially the lives of the unborn, will be held sacred. Prayer and sacrifices have changed hearts and moved mountains before, and with God’s grace it can happen again. So our prayer here at Mass, our prayer out on the street, our personal prayer at home, is not only powerful, but essential in the battle to restore a culture of life in our midst. It’s more than a political issue; it’s a spiritual battle. As St. Paul tells us today, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” And that is what we must do.

There are some who will say that the right to life for the unborn is just one issue, that there are lots of issues we should be concerned about. And that’s true, there are many things we must work to change in our world. But life comes first. Pope Francis reaffirmed this in his meeting with bishops from the United States last January. He agreed that the right to life must be first. If that right falls, then every other right falls too. He agreed with the affirmation of the bishops of the United States that ending abortion is the preeminent priority in our efforts to respect and cherish the gift of life.

So we, as the people God has called to himself, must do all we can to work for the sanctity and protection of life. Christians must be a leaven in the world, like yeast that spreads out through the mass of dough and changes it, transforms it, and gives it life. In this political season, every cause tries to get our support and our vote, but there is no greater cause than life itself. As followers of Jesus and good tenants in his vineyard, let us commit ourselves once again to the sacredness of life, and do all we can to bring his Kingdom of life to fulfillment.