



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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Catholics are both/and people, not either/or

At the recent November 2019 USCCB meeting, there were unedifying words exchanged about what was most important, respect life or social justice (read: works of mercy).

This was bad because it appeared to set this up as an either/or proposition, as if to say, forget the works of mercy and put all your focus instead on respect life (or vice-versa).

And worse yet was the implication made, that to give prominence to respect life was somehow being unfaithful to the teaching of Pope Francis. For shame!

The first was bad because for Catholics these are both/and issues, not either/or. The right to life and the works of mercy, which give the poor access to things needed to live in dignity, are foundational to Catholic social teaching.

Things like food and shelter, productive work and fair wages, education and health care, and protection from harm, are fought for and defended as human rights because they constitute a dignified human life. Of course, first the right to life has to be defended, otherwise those other rights make no sense, have no context.

And it is just plain wrong to claim that giving pre-eminence to respect life puts you at odds with the teaching of Pope Francis.

In **Joy of the Gospel** Pope Francis wrote that "the defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development...Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights...Because this involves the internal consistency of our message about the value of the human person, the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question...It is not 'progressive' to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life" (213-214).

And in **Rejoice and Be Glad** the Pope wrote that "our defense of the innocent unborn needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection" (101).

As a consequence of our both/and stance, we have a responsibility to provide for and protect those who are unable to provide for or protect themselves.

Our responsibility to provide for and protect others is greatest when they are least able to do for themselves, say, a child in the womb or the poor.

Our responsibility may decrease as the other person's ability to provide for and protect himself increases, but it never ever goes away entirely.

Catholics are both/and people. Defend the right to life. Do the works of mercy.

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque