June 6, 2015

Dear People of the Diocese of Charlottetown:

Two recent events have further eroded society’s appreciation for human life. First, the government of Prince Edward Island has made easier a person’s access to abortion. Second, on February 6, 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down laws against assisted suicide and opened the door to physician assisted suicide.

It was no surprise therefore, when a couple of days ago a friend sadly confided, “Well Bishop, I guess we really are developing a culture of death.” There was sadness in the tone of his voice.

His comment made me revisit Saint Pope John Paul’s prescient encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

> “This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, between death and life, the ‘culture of death’ and the ‘culture of life’. We find ourselves not only ‘faced with’ but necessarily in the midst of this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.” *Evangelium Vitae*, (25 March 1995) #28.

Culture is like the air we breathe. If it is an air of death we may feel threatened and fearful. We must not let the fear and sadness of current events erode our conviction about the sanctity and inviolability of human life. Nor must our distress due to these events diminish our determination to share our convictions with others. If the sanctity of human life is being eroded then the Holy Spirit will bestow grace on us even more abundantly to defend life with hope, with justice and above all with charity.

We are told in the Book of Genesis, “In the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Gen.1:27). Since the beginning, human life has reflected the holiness of God. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that the life of every individual, from its very beginning is part of God’s plan: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jeremiah 1:5). At the dawn of salvation, the birth of a child is proclaimed as joyful news, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David, A Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke2:10). On Friday we celebrated the Feast of the Sacred Heart, a symbol of Jesus’ desire to accomplish his mission, “I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). He is referring to a new life, and eternal life of communion with God. Jesus described himself to Martha, the sister of Lazarus this way: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). The message of these few quotations from the Bible is not merely pro-life; it is good news; it is a message of joy.
Through Baptism we are all called to serve the Gospel of Life. So what can we do? There are at least three ways we can answer the call to serve the Gospel of Life.

First, we can pray. Conversion to a culture of life happens when human hearts are converted. We can pray for the grace of conversion.

Second, we can bear witness to our belief in the Gospel of life. We can be open and candid about our conviction in the inviolability of life from conception to natural death. Many family members, friends, colleagues and even strangers easily succumb to lethal cultural values. Sharing our faith with them can give them the strength they need to promote and protect life.

Third, we can act. We are Roman Catholic but we are also citizens of Canada. We contribute substantially to the welfare of society and culture. And so, some of us may enter the forum of politics; others can express their pro-life position by writing letters to their political representatives. For those of us who feel awkward about writing or political involvement, we can lend overt support to those lay Catholic Christian leaders who promote life in the community. They too need strength and endurance to serve the Gospel of Life. We can stand in solidarity with them.

In our struggle to foster a culture of life, let us remember we are a pilgrim people, on a journey towards a "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). God has sent us the Holy Spirit to help and guide us on our journey; a Spirit of Truth and Justice; a Spirit of Peace and Mercy; a Spirit of Prayer and Patient Endurance. God has also given us Mary, our Blessed Mother, as a sure sign of hope in the midst our human efforts to celebrate and protect life.

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Diocese of Charlottetown