



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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Respect Life Sunday 2023

October 1, 2023: [Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time](#)

Readings (Lectionary: 136)

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

By turning from wickedness, a wicked person shall preserve his life.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11 or Philippians 2:1-5

Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Acclamation: John 10:27

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them, and they follow me.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

He changed his mind and went. Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven before you.

Lectionary Notes

In the second reading, St. Paul beautifully calls followers of Christ to be united in mind, heart, and love. He encourages Jesus' disciples to reject selfishness and "rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others." St. Paul presents Jesus as the perfect model for us to imitate, for Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

As Christians, we are called to what Pope St. John Paul II called "radical solidarity"ⁱⁱ with women who are pregnant or parenting in difficult circumstances—and with their children, born or preborn. Solidarity is the way in which we put our love for others into action. Pope Francis reminds us that solidarity "refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a *new mindset*,"ⁱⁱⁱ a transformation within our own hearts. As disciples of Christ, we are called to make a sacrificial gift of ourselves for the sake of our neighbor. Radical solidarity compels us to be at the side of vulnerable mothers in profound friendship, compassion, and support for both them and their preborn children. It requires us to address the fundamental challenges that lead an expectant mother to believe she is unable to welcome the child God has entrusted to her.

Radical solidarity can be lived out in countless ways, including volunteering at your local pregnancy help center; helping an expectant mother find stable housing; babysitting so a mom can work or take classes; providing encouragement and a listening ear to a mom without a support system; or launching [Walking with Moms in Need](#) right here at the parish.

In reaction to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, some areas of the country now protect the child in the womb, while others are doing all they can to increase access to abortion. At this critical moment, we have been entrusted with new *opportunities* and new *responsibilities* to build a civilization of authentic

love. We must do all we can to help mothers and their children flourish. This cannot be accomplished by laws or policy alone, but requires the continual transformation of our own hearts, so that we may recognize in every person the face of Christ and place their needs before our own. We pray that we may be of one mind and one heart as we respond to the needs of mothers and their children.

Illustrative Stories

Consider incorporating one or two of these stories to illustrate the message of the Second Reading: “Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.”

- [Melissa, a North Carolina mom](#)ⁱⁱⁱ with young children and a busy job, attended a parish informational session for *Walking with Moms in Need*, thinking she might help out here and there. But she felt the Lord’s call and “by the end of the session she had volunteered to be the ministry’s coordinator.” Her parish now holds “Hand Up Days” once a month during which families can “shop” free of charge for baby and toddler items they need that have been donated by parishioners.

Melissa shared some powerful words of encouragement: “I think for too long we have been comfortable leaving the work of accompanying women in crisis situations – pregnant or parenting – to others in the nonprofit and government sectors. It is very clear in the Gospel that this is our job — all of us! A woman in a pregnancy center once told me that most women considering abortion are wrestling with a financial matter less than \$250 and that has really stuck with me. If we can lighten the burden just a little, what a difference we can make — it is literally life or death.”

- Amanda (*name changed for privacy*) was estranged from her husband, had a 12-year-old son, and was pregnant. When she called the Gabriel Project for help, she had just lost her job, and her health insurance, because she could not do the heavy lifting required of a nurse’s aid. Amanda had a part time job that allowed her to pay her half of the rent, since her husband would only pay his half. And then the eviction notice arrived, and Amanda found out that her husband had not been paying his half of the rent. Amanda, and her unborn child, and her 12-year-old son, would soon be homeless. When Amanda called for help, the parish volunteers connected her with legal help to block the eviction, and raised funds to show the landlord that she was making headway in paying the back rent. Other parishioners provided furniture and baby items and, more importantly, friendship and moral support. Thanks to the help, Amanda now has a beautiful daughter, has a new apartment with her children, has the furniture and baby items that she needs, and has returned to her job.
- Jessica (*name changed for privacy*) made a last ditch call for help from a bus in Washington DC. She was pregnant and homeless, and she was using the bus for a place to keep warm. Jessica had just scheduled an abortion because she didn’t want to have her child on the streets in winter. Jessica, homeless and pregnant, called from a bus and reached a church-based ministry that provided free housing, case management, and the support of caring volunteers. With this help, Jessica’s natural drive could shine through. She found a job with benefits near her new home and was promoted three times before her son was born. She established new, healthy life habits, and was blessed with

her very own car from the generosity of a local Catholic parishioner. Jessica and her son are now thriving in their own apartment and are confidently building a new life together.

- Fleeing food shortages, hyperinflation, and political unrest, Maria (*name changed for privacy*) came to the United States seeking a better future. Arriving here, her situation went from bad to worse. Though trained as a nurse, she couldn't find work. When she found out she was pregnant, her boyfriend kicked her out. Because her visa had expired, immigration officers put a tracking device on her ankle. She found herself homeless, facing deportation, and searching for an abortion. By God's grace, she ended up at a pregnancy help center where she saw an image of her unborn son via ultrasound. More than anything, Maria wanted to give birth to her baby, but she was fearful. She was worried she would be deported before giving birth and feared that if she had to return to Venezuela, her child would be malnourished and be deprived of basic medical care. She was still leaning towards having an abortion. Through the combined efforts of the pregnancy help center, pro-bono attorneys, a local parish, and Catholic Charities, Maria was provided with emotional support, encouragement, housing, and medical care. She was also helped to get a work permit through her political asylum. With that kind of support, she found hope – and she chose life for her son.

Examples of How Parishioners Can Apply the Message

God has given each of us particular gifts, and with those gifts he entrusts us with a role and duty within the Body of Christ. Embracing an attitude of radical solidarity calls us to honestly reflect on some challenging questions and to consider specific actions we can take to foster an authentic culture of life.

- As you go about your week, consider: *Do I know what efforts are happening in our area to help women who are pregnant or parenting in difficult circumstances? What are the needs? What are my gifts and talents? How can I adjust my schedule or budget to assist efforts to help moms in need and their children?*
- Set aside some time today or tomorrow to read back through today's Second Reading. *How is the Lord asking you to put others first?*
- Pray the Respect Life Month novena (October 13-21). Visit www.respectlife.org to sign up for daily emails.
- Start a Walking with Moms in Need group here at our parish. More information can be found at www.walkingwithmoms.com. *(If you are not the pastor, be sure to clear this with him first. If your parish already has a Walking with Moms in Need group, ask the lead contact how other parishioners can find details on getting involved and share that instead. Also ask them for a success story that you can share from your own parish.)*

ⁱ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 207.

ⁱⁱ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, no. 188.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Ascik, "One of the Best Ways to Walk with Moms in Need," *Aleteia*, March 23, 2023, <https://aleteia.org/2023/03/22/one-of-the-best-ways-to-walk-with-moms-in-need/>.