St. Joseph as a Model for Protecting Life

Into Your Hands | *Archbishop Robert G. Casey*

As our Church celebrates Respect Life Month this October, we might give some thought to St. Joseph, who serves as a model for how we can incorporate respect for life into our daily discipleship. We know St. Joseph to be a defender of dignity, a model of faith, and a protector of the vulnerable. As a defender of dignity, Joseph stood by Mary at a time when others would have judged and condemned her. As a model of faith, Joseph demonstrated deep trust in God's will, even when the path forward for Mary and him seemed unclear and challenging. As a protector of the vulnerable, Joseph embraced his vocation as husband and father, enfolding Mary and Jesus in his shielding embrace.

As we see human life becoming a disposable commodity for many people in the world, we join St. Joseph in proclaiming the goodness and sacredness of all life, so that each person's dignity may be defended from womb to tomb. We are compelled to educate others about concerning practices that continue to grow. For example, the usage of abortion pills, which dehumanize pregnancy and disconnect couples from the physical, spiritual, and emotional effects of their choices, as well as medical assistance in dying, a practice quite different from hospice ministry that fuels indifference and ignores the worth of those who suffer.

As we see a growing separation between faith and society, we join St. Joseph in declaring that all that we do, from the most mundane daily labor to the most sacred worship, must reveal God to the world. Otherwise, all too easily, faith becomes a private experience. As we struggle to comprehend why things are the way they are, we must strive to prevent ourselves from becoming exceedingly defensive, with hardened hearts and closed minds.

From the unborn to the migrant in our midst, we hear the voice of the vulnerable crying out for our protection today. The world around us may demand we follow a path that divides and conquers. Many will insist that it's every man and woman for him or herself; individual wants supersede the importance of anyone else's needs or wants. Yet, like St. Joseph, we believe differently. We hear the voice of Jesus in the voice of the vulnerable, the same Jesus who prayed, "that all may be one."

This past month, I wrote a Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist to the faithful of our archdiocese in which I discuss the importance of striving for greater unity among all children of God. Our protection of the vulnerable is linked directly to our identity as a Eucharistic people, a community defined by our experience of communion. One with God and one with neighbor, we seek to protect the most defenseless from those who might wish to do them harm, knowing that when one of us suffers, all of us suffer. Unity is at the heart of the Church's mission. My hope is that my Pastoral Letter, entitled "That They All May Be One," will be a catalyst for greater communion with God and one another through the liturgical life of our archdiocese and embolden us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

Through his quiet strength and obedience to God, St. Joseph offers a powerful example of the protection of human life and dignity. Throughout the year, may we imitate his faithful trust and fearless conviction in our efforts to uphold human dignity and celebrate the gift of life. Like St. Joseph, may we offer those around us a powerful witness, teaching through words and example that all life is sacred.