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June 28, 2006

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Call to Faith Morality

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# 2 VALUING Life

## WHAT'S the ISSUE?

Does every person have the same dignity and value in God's eyes?

What does it mean to say we value and respect ALL life?

**I**t was supposed to be a happy time in their lives. At least, that's what David's parents kept telling him. His mom was pregnant, and he was going to be an older brother. But his parents were nervous—and so was David. Not nervous like every parent is nervous about a new baby, but nervous because there were some serious challenges involved.



After visiting the doctor, they had come home more than a little rattled. Tests showed that his sister might be born with Down Syndrome. The word his parents used to describe her was “special.” They never used any kind of words to suggest that his sister might be less a person—only that she would go through life facing challenges. David, with his mom and dad, already pictured her as a little girl. They imagined how he would help her as a big brother.

David got a little angry when he overheard his uncle asking his aunt why his parents would even allow this baby to be born! His uncle couldn't imagine what kind of life the girl would have and whether it was worth it!

David thought his comment was wrong. David had friends at school who were born with limitations that made their lives challenging. Some had trouble seeing and some were hearing impaired. His best friend, Rob, had been born with only one hand, but he played baseball and soccer and was on the swim team. Some kids had high IQs; others had lower IQs. Some had learning difficulties; others had attention deficits. Tons of kids had something “special” that challenged them.

When he told his parents about what he had overheard and what he was thinking, they said they were so proud of him—he was going to make a wonderful older brother. That's why we're here, they said, to help each other make it through life.



God of all life,  
help us to honor  
and respect all life.

## WHAT ABOUT IT?

- ▶ Why do other people share the uncle's opinion?
- ▶ As she grows up in this family, how will this girl's special challenges affect the other members, especially her older brother?

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

- ▶ How would you react if you were in David's situation?
- ▶ People are often ridiculed because of challenges or differences. In a week's time, how often do you hear ridiculing or judging of others?
- ▶ How often do you laugh at the misfortune of others?

# WHAT does FAITH SAY?

## CONNECT

In the story, David encounters someone close to him who does not value the life of those who have physical challenges. David must have felt both angry and hurt that a person could say such things about his unborn sister. All people are made in God's image and possess human dignity. We have a responsibility to respect, protect, and care for life at all stages.

## SCRIPTURE

### GO TO THE SOURCE

Read **Psalm 139:13–16**. What does this song of praise tell you about your relationship to God—past, present, and future? What good can come from praising God for creating you and knowing you?

# A SACRED GIFT FROM GOD

Why does human life have value?

If we could choose how we look and what abilities we have, we might change some things. But it's not up to us to choose our challenges. We do not enter this world on our own. Each of us owes his or her life to God. One life is not more valuable than another. We are all equally valuable because each of us has been given the divine spark of life from God.

## Made in the Image of the Divine

Sometimes it's possible to tell the manufacturer of one pair of jeans from another, or you can always look at the tag to discover who the designer is. A cartoon shows Adam looking at a "Made by God" tag on his foot with a smile on his face. That's a joke, but there really are ways God has "tagged" us as his creation.

Human beings are so unique and beautifully made, because God designed us. For this reason, the author of the psalm praises God, saying,

## SCRIPTURE

"For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
You knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

—Psalm 139:13–14

Now, we really don't know how the man who wrote that psalm looked or what his limitations were. But he praised God for the way he was made. He believed God had a plan for his life that he was made to fulfill.

Not only are we made by God, but of all the creatures, humans alone have



the capacity for “self-awareness”—we know we are individuals, separate from the world around us. We are able to recognize God’s presence and freely choose to know, love, and serve God.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. For this reason, each human life has a sacred value from conception to death. This value cannot be taken away or lessened by any condition or situation.



## Usefulness

What do you do when your favorite pair of shoes is so beat up that they’re falling apart? You probably toss them in the trash; they’re no longer useful. We tend to throw away all sorts of things when they’re not useful anymore. Usefulness determines their value to us.

Human beings, however, are different. We are not things. We are not objects to be used or set aside. We do not determine our value by our usefulness.

Our value comes directly from God who made us and for whom we exist. We have that value when we are healthy or sick, young or old. Even when dying, our life has worth. When we die, our existence continues. Even beyond life on earth, we are made in God’s image. We continue to fulfill our purpose with our Creator.

The Fifth Commandment instructs us not to kill another person. We who are sacred should not be discarded, judged useless, or killed. Those kinds of decisions are simply not ours to make. **Murder** is the deliberate killing of another person. It is always gravely sinful. It shows the contempt the murderer has for the dignity of human life as well as for the holiness and goodness of God.

Sometimes life is so difficult that people don’t feel valued or respected; they may be totally overwhelmed, feeling helpless and unsure. Their pain is real, and they may lose sight of the fact that their life is a gift from God. God wants us to stick with this precious gift. Suicide is *never* an option because it goes against God’s love and our hope and it’s forbidden by the Fifth Commandment. But asking for help is an option.

## Faith Walk

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . .’  
So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them; male  
and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26–27

Every human being wears a very special label. That label says, Made by God. God is your designer. You, your family members, your friends, and all people—rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, black and white—are Made by God, in his image. Each person has a right to dignity, and a right to the care and respect of others.

*What would you include in the care instructions on our Made by God labels?*

## Next Step

# HONORING LIFE

What does the Church teach about protecting life at all stages?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to the Fifth Commandment, which bans murder. He then widens the understanding to include anger and vengeance, "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment . . ." (*Matthew 5:22*). Jesus understands human nature and speaks against destructive emotions that can lead to worse things. Anger, hatred, and vengeance are terrible emotions that tear apart people's lives.



## SCRIPTURE

### GO TO THE SOURCE

Read more of the Sermon on the Mount from **Matthew 5:38–48**. What does Jesus teach about retaliation and loving your enemies?

## An Example

Jesus doesn't preach one message and live another. His actions and behavior show that he values life. He tells the disciples, "But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer . . ." (*Matthew 5:39*); if someone strikes them on one cheek, they should offer the other cheek. When Jesus was arrested, he faced his enemies and allowed them to lead him to an unjust trial and execution. The Lord of all life upholds and honors every human life to the point of not raising a hand against his oppressors or even allowing his disciples to take up the sword against them.

## The Church Follows Her Master

The Church has taken a stand on life issues, advocating for the rights of others. For example, over the centuries the Church has established Church-sponsored hospitals, outreach organizations, and programs for the poor, immigrants, children, victims of domestic abuse, and others in need.

The Church also confronts today's culture. It spreads the message—through preaching, outreach groups, papal encyclicals, bishops' letters, media campaigns, and more—that each human life, from conception to natural death, deserves respect. Every person is a child of God, worthy of rights and protection.



## Safeguarding Life

A human life still in the womb or a life that is no longer as strong as it once was is to be protected from direct harm. Because of this teaching, **abortion**, the deliberate termination of a pregnancy by killing an unborn child, is a grave sin. The Church does not believe that human life begins at some arbitrary point later in a pregnancy. An embryo requires the same efforts of care and healing as any human. Life is bestowed by God at conception. We are called to protect the life of the most vulnerable.

In the same way, our lives cannot be considered less valuable because we are older or sick. For this reason, **euthanasia**—the deliberate action or nonaction that causes the death of someone who is sick, dying, or suffering because of disabilities or a debilitating condition is also a grave sin. We owe tender care to those who, at the end of their lives, are most fragile. It follows from this principle that sometimes we must defend ourselves, or others, from a person or group of people causing harm. It is legitimate and necessary to defend the lives of others, and this is a serious duty for those who have responsibility for the lives of others.

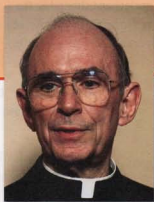
## "SEAMLESS GARMENT OF LIFE"

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.'"

— John 19:23–24

The fabric of God's creation is threatened when we tear it, gamble over pieces of it, or claim ownership of any part of it. That's the Catholic belief we have toward human life. No life should be torn, ruined, destroyed.

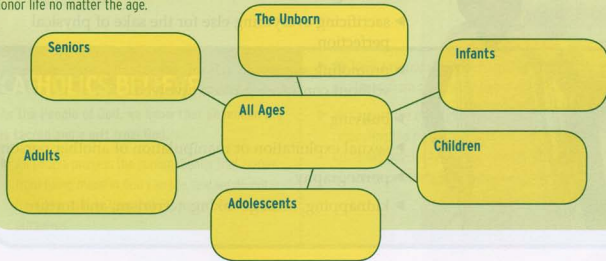
The late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, described this teaching as a "consistent ethic of life." Catholics should honor, respect, and defend all life. Bernardin taught that Catholics must be consistent, or seamless, in opposing abortion, the death penalty, war, the nuclear arms race, and anything that threatens life. Being seamless in our approach to the sacredness of human life makes the human family, and the Church, stronger.



▲ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

## CONNECT YOUR FAITH

Think about the different organizations or people that protect the right to life of people at different stages of life. In the diagram below, name two ways you can value and honor life at each stage. In the center, name two ways you can value and honor life no matter the age.



# RESPECTING THE HUMAN PERSON

## CATHOLICS TODAY

Physical health is a precious gift entrusted to us by God, and it is society's responsibility to provide reasonable health care for all its citizens. Many Catholic healthcare institutions and hospitals have organized under the umbrella of the Catholic Health Association to promote the common good of society and strengthen the Church's outreach to those who are physically and mentally hurting.

Why is it important to take care of ourselves and others?

Unkind words are hurtful, they can affect how people think and feel about themselves. Unkind words don't have a positive purpose.

If words can be demeaning and cause damage, think about how much worse it is to allow harmful conditions to continue. Harmful conditions that deny people their rights exist all around us: people living in poverty with no means to change the situation, trapped in unsafe housing, or people who don't have access to an education, health care, or a job.

People need these basic rights met in order to grow and mature. Without them, they are constantly using all of their energy merely to survive. They cannot flourish as God would want.

## Raising Ourselves Up

A great piece of artwork is meant to be put on display so that everyone can appreciate it and be made better by it. We are God's work of art. The human person is the pinnacle of creation.

We honor the human person, so that all might appreciate and be made better by the creative work of God among us. We avoid all the things that damage the artistry of God at work in the human person, such as overindulgence, extremism, or physical and mental intimidation. For example:

- ▶ abusing food, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs
- ▶ sacrificing everything else for the sake of physical perfection
- ▶ promoting success in school, popularity, and sports without considering those involved
- ▶ bullying
- ▶ sexual exploitation or manipulation of another person
- ▶ pornography
- ▶ kidnapping, hostage-taking, terrorism, and torture



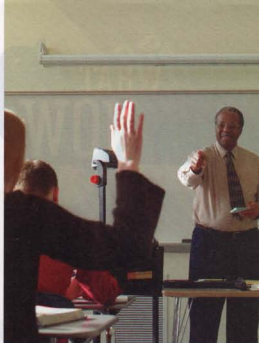


## Care for Others

Harsh words are not the only way people harm others. Another way is to encourage others to do sinful things. Jesus warns his disciples against leading others into sin. He says, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

**Scandal** is the name given to the destructive behavior by which we deliberately lead others to sin through our own action or inaction. For example, the sin of scandal is committed when a radio talk show host rallies his listeners to engage in racism.

Those in authority or who influence public opinion have a greater responsibility to guard against scandal because they can promote or hinder how we perceive and care for one another.



## Faith Walk

Have you ever been told that you have an attitude or an attitude problem? Often, the word "attitude" is used to describe negative behavior. Everyone has an attitude. Attitudes, words, and actions tell people a lot about what we believe and value, and what is important to us.

Our **attitudes** involve our beliefs, feelings, and values, and lead us to act in certain ways. Think about your attitudes toward others, especially toward those who are different than you. Do your attitudes respect the life and dignity of others?

**Words** can heal and words can hurt. Words reflect our attitudes. What we say has tremendous power to spread goodness, respect, and dignity for others. Think about the words you use in your relationships with others. Do they build people up or tear people down?

Our **actions**, what we do, also communicate what we believe and value. Some say that actions speak louder than words. What do people know about what you believe by what they see you do? Are your actions evidence that you respect all life?

## Next Step

### CATHOLICS BELIEVE

**As the People of God, we know that all human life is sacred and a gift from God.**

- ▶ All people possess the human dignity that comes from being made in God's image, and we do not have the right to take that life away from others or ourselves.

- ▶ We have a responsibility to honor and protect life at all stages, from conception to old age.
- ▶ We respect the dignity of the human person by respecting the rights of others, taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally, not abusing ourselves or others, and by not leading others into sin.

# WHAT NOW?

## LIVE OUR FAITH

- ★ Examine the respect you have for the life that God has given to those around you.
- ★ Evaluate whether your conscience needs more strengthening.
- ★ Remind yourself that everyone is a person just like you and speak of them as such.
- ★ Use positive language when talking about others. Don't use ethnic or racial labels.
- ★ Imagine yourself in the other person's place.

## WHAT ABOUT IT?

### WHAT About YOU?

Think of your life as a garment. What "tears" or "holes" do you need to repair in the way you live your own life?

Do your attitudes or actions toward others' lives, as well as all of life, also cause "tears"? Write your observations down on a note card to keep as a reminder to value yourself and others as God does.

Popular culture is a carrier of values. Make a list of movies, television shows, books, or songs that encourage respecting life and those that de-value life. As a group, make a list. Discuss the items you have listed in common.

### my list

### group list



## PRAYER

Loving Father, giver of all that is good in our lives, we ask for the guidance of your Spirit. Help us to remember that all life is sacred. Help us to celebrate, honor, and respect everyone we meet, especially those who are different from us. Help us to always choose life! Amen.

## FAITH at HOME

Every family experiences stresses and tensions. Sometimes we forget to love each other well in the simple way we treat each other, day to day. At a family meal, talk about how family members demonstrate love and respect for each other. Decide on one area that needs to change, such as the language you use with each other, or being more patient, then challenge each other to do it!



Visit [www.osvcurriculum.com](http://www.osvcurriculum.com) for more family and community connections.

## Venerable Pierre Toussaint

generous acts are a shining example of how we, as Catholics, should live our lives in service and in prayer. As a devout layperson, he gave his life to serving the sick, the disabled, and the uneducated.

Pierre was born into slavery on the Berard family plantation in 1766. His family, parents and grandparents, were domestic slaves on the French island colony of Saint-Dominique (now Haiti). The Berard family treated their slaves more kindly than most French colonists, encouraging young Pierre to read and develop his natural musical gifts and talents.

Jean Berard, fearing that a slave revolt was coming soon, moved his family—including Pierre, Pierre's aunt, and sister Rosalie—to New York. There they rented a three-story house where Pierre learned how to speak English. Eventually, he became a hairdresser.

In 1789 Jean Berard died. Pierre helped to maintain the house until Mrs. Berard's death ten years later. Meanwhile, he dutifully attended church every morning and began assisting the pastor. Just before Marie Berard died, she drew up papers granting Pierre his freedom.

Once he was free, Pierre married Juliette Noel, who had also worked in the Berard household. He also bought his sister Rosalie's freedom. When Rosalie died soon after giving birth, Pierre and Juliette became the adoptive parents of Rosalie's daughter.

Pierre worked tirelessly with the needy in New York. He raised money to build a new church (St. Peter's), opened an orphanage, and started a Catholic school for black children. When yellow fever broke out, he risked infection caring for its victims. His faith kept him strong enough to help others. He often brought homeless African American boys home for a hot meal and helped them find jobs.

Once he was turned away from attending Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral because of his color. Though angered by the insult, he didn't protest. Later he received an apology from the pastor, who hadn't realized that Pierre had helped raise money to build the church. He continued to attend church regularly until he became bedridden.

Shortly before he died, a friend asked him if he wanted anything. He smiled from his sickbed and replied, "Nothing on this earth!" He died in 1853 at age eighty-seven. The cause for his canonization began in 1989.

**Pierre** Toussaint's life stands out as an example of how to show our faith through our works. His



### Global Data

- Haiti is the western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, sharing the island with the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic.
- Haiti was visited by Columbus in 1492 and colonized by the French in 1697, with the help of imported African slaves.
- Haiti was the first predominantly black nation in the Western Hemisphere to win independence, following a successful revolt against French rule in 1804.
- Haiti has a population of 7.6 million, about 80 percent of whom are Catholic.

