

Homily: 27th Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Hab 1: 2-3; 2:2-4; Ps 95; 2Tim 1: 6-8, 13-14; Lk
17: 5-10

“Respecting the Gift of Human Life”

The first Sunday in October every year is called “Respect Life Sunday” in the Catholic Church in America. It is a yearly call to remember that all human beings, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death, are created in the image of God.

1. The first reading from the prophet Habakkuk is a profoundly realistic reflection on the frustration of the prophet in the face of violence, injustice and destruction. We as believers also deal with a similar culture today, which Pope St. John Paul II famously called a “culture of death” (see his encyclical **Evangelium Vitae: the Gospel of Life**: 1995) and Pope Francis has called “the disposable society” which often fails to see the human person as being made in God’s image - *hence we have to deal with legalized abortion, the push for legalized euthanasia, the downplaying of the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman, the lack of respect for the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, the pushing to the side of the most vulnerable members of society, be it the unborn, the handicapped, the mentally ill, or the terminally ill.* What do we do in the face of that troubling reality? Do we get angry and frustrated and take on a cynical attitude: *that it is just the way things are and there is nothing we can do about it?* **Or do we see that we indeed can make things better one person at a time?** Remember what the Lord says today to Habakkuk: God’s vision of life will come into being in due time and will not disappoint, but we have to wait on the Lord in **patience and faith**. *“The rash person has no integrity; but the just person because of his faith shall live.”*
2. We need to do our part to speak up in defense of the Lord’s vision of love and respect for life in our circumstances, be it in our families, among our acquaintances, and at school and at work. **God will give us the grace and strength to do so, if we ask Him.** Remember what Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25: *whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me.* In our day, one of the main ways we do this, in addition to living **the**

Spiritual and Corporeal works of Mercy as we are called to do by Pope Francis during this Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy, is to be “a People of Life”. Defending human life in all its forms, especially when it is under attack, is not easy; but as St. Paul says today, *“Do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord... but bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God.”* We can do this through becoming informed on what the Church teaches on the “life issues” and why it teaches it, and then speaking up in love and integrity. We can do this by daily praying for the protection of human life where and when it is under attack by others. We can do this by supporting Church and public officials who have the courage to go on the record in defense of life. We can do this by supporting pro-life organizations, *like Mom’s house and Human Life International* which help to defend life against the attacks of some in our culture and world. We can do this, in a spirit of love and humility, by pointing out to people we know, who may have sinned against life, e.g., by participating in or encouraging an abortion (which is the gravest of sins), that there is indeed forgiveness and healing from God and the Church in the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** and in post-abortion counseling services like **Project Rachel** (www.hopeafterabortion.com). There is much for us to do in all these areas of witness or testimony as St. Paul says; “bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God.”

3. Finally we should turn to our Lady, who we honor in a special way during the month of October, and ask her to help us in this noble cause of defending and protecting all human life made in the image of her Son Jesus. She is often invoked under her title of “**Our Lady of Guadalupe**” by people in the Pro-life ministry since in her approved apparition at Guadalupe, Mexico in 1531 (December 9-12) she appeared as a Pregnant Native American princess, as far as we know, the only time we know of as a Church that she appeared pregnant, in an apparition. It was not accidental, for it was soon afterwards that the vast majority of the Native American Aztec people were converted to Catholicism. *“The news of the appearance of the Indian mother who left her imprint on the tilma spread like*

wildfire! Three points were appreciated by the native population. **First**, the lady was Indian, spoke Nahuatl, the Aztec language, and appeared to an Indian, not a Spaniard! **Second**, Juan Diego explained that she appeared at Tepeyac, the place of Tonantzin, the mother god, sending a clear message that the Virgin Mary was the mother of the true God-man Jesus, and that the Christian religion was to replace the Aztec religion. And **third**, the Indians, who learned through pictures and symbols, understood the image of the tilma, which revealed the beautiful message of Christianity: the true God sacrificed himself for mankind; instead of the horrendous life they had endured sacrificing humans to appease the frightful gods! It is no wonder that over the next seven years, from 1531 to 1538, eight million natives of Mexico converted to Catholicism!” (from the article “Our Lady of Guadalupe Mother of the Americas” from www.maryourmother.net/Guadalupe.html) **The Aztecs of course had practiced human sacrifice as part of their religious ceremonies.** We need to similarly invoke her help in our culture, so that we turn away from the “culture of death” that allows such things as modern human sacrifice, namely legalized abortion, and instead build up a “culture of life and love” that respects and protects each human person, and fosters the sanctity of marriage and the dignity of each life no matter what obstacles we may face. We need to pray for **the conversion of the hearts** of all in our world today: that we as a people learn to love human life ever more deeply, to protect life in our laws and institutions, and to take care of the most vulnerable among us. **WHY?** Because that is what God calls us to do- Jesus says in the Gospel, “*whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me*” - our **Final Judgment** will be based on that! Never forget that truth! Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

Recommended reading:

The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae). John Paul II. 1995. Pauline Books and Media. Boston.