



No amount of good social policy, such as programs that feed the hungry and shelter the homeless – as vitally important as they are – can make up for bad policies concerning the protection of life itself. Without the fundamental right to live, the right to not be killed, no other rights are meaningful. In fact, without life no other rights can exist.

Pope Benedict reminds us in *God Is Love* that, as Catholics, we are called to make God’s love present in the world. He noted that the bishops “help form consciences in political life and stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice” (no. 28). But, he emphasized, it is the responsibility of lay Catholics to work for a “just ordering of society” and “to take part in public life in a personal capacity” (no. 29).

In other words, it is up to Catholic laypeople to participate directly in public life, helping to enact laws and policies that respect the lives of all, especially those who have no voice—unborn children, human embryos targeted for destructive research, and those who are cognitively impaired, disabled or dying.

Whether we are writing letters to elected representatives, voting, campaigning, or simply providing friends and colleagues with solid information about the grave moral issues of our day, our participation in American public life should at all times be guided by this fundamental truth: each one of us—including those with whom we strongly disagree—is *created, loved and redeemed by God*. We, and they, are priceless in his eyes.

By speaking the truth about human life in love, we can help build a society that protects and respects every human life, born and unborn, and better reflects our status as children of God.



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created

loved

REDEEMED

by God

PRICELESS

Respect Life

CREATED, LOVED, REDEEMED BY GOD.

An Invitation to Respect All Human Life

Most of us probably take for granted (at least some of the time) that we are *created, loved and redeemed by God*. Yet, distracted as we are by the noise and activities of daily life, we need to make time to reflect on this central truth of life – and the answer to the universal human question: Who am I, and what am I doing here?

When our ancestors in faith lost their moral and spiritual bearings, Jesus took on human flesh to show us the radical nature of God's love. His love is far from being passive, generic or abstract. It is not just a kindly feeling toward others. Jesus' love was personal, passionate and self-giving.

He showed us by example, as well as through parables, what God expects of us. At the Last Supper, he told the apostles: "This is my commandment: Love one another as I love you" (John 15:12). Jesus was not speaking of affectionate feelings that we have for family and friends. The model of love by which we will be measured, according to the parable of the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25: 31-46), is that of the righteous who visited prisoners, and fed, clothed, welcomed and cared for the needy and strangers. They were *servicing Christ* in the needy and will "inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25: 34).

As Christians, then, each one of us is called, to the best of his or her ability, to be involved in:

- personal, concrete and practical acts of kindness toward those whom God puts in our paths
- organized charitable activities, through personal service and/or financial support
- working toward a just ordering of society by taking part in public life to help ensure that laws and policies respect the lives and dignity of all, especially those who are most vulnerable (Pope Benedict XVI, *God Is Love*)

Most of us, even if we slip up more often than we care to admit, understand the importance of treating all with kindness. We understand the need to work with the Church's charities serving those in need, whether we do so by donating our time or our financial support.

But we are called to do more. As the U.S. Catholic bishops explained in *Living the Gospel of Life*: "The common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights – for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture – is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination" (no. 19, quoting *Christifideles Laici*, 38). In other words, *talk* about the value of human life and the sacredness of human dignity can become empty platitudes unless we *act* on our convictions.

Today the intentional destruction of human life at its beginning and at its end have become the preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself.

- Well over a million children are aborted every year in the United States alone; some are killed by methods so brutal society would not tolerate their use against defenseless animals. The reasons given for undergoing abortion are overwhelmingly social reasons.
- Abortion harms women as well. Some die (not just the publicized deaths from RU-486), and others are scarred physically and emotionally. Increasing numbers of women are speaking out about the years of grief and depression that followed their abortions.
- Scientists destroy human embryos to harvest their stem cells – perhaps convincing themselves that the killing is outweighed by potential cures. Some are trying to clone human embryos to use in research. These unethical efforts continue despite impressive medical successes in treating patients with adult stem cells, including those from umbilical cord blood, and despite the fact that potential cures from embryonic stem cells remain theoretical. Several states have even begun to fund unethical cloning and embryo research with taxpayer funds.
- Increasingly it is argued that assisted suicide and euthanasia are appropriate treatments for the very old and for those with mental or physical disabilities. In the U.S., Oregon is the only state to have legalized assisted suicide, but other states are being urged to follow suit. Legal euthanasia and assisted suicide are spreading across Europe.