

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 A

I want to propose three simple observations, and they require nothing more than a moment's awareness. First, take a look at your fingerprints. They are unique to you among all humanity, and all human history. They are one external sign of the remarkable and irrepeatable complexity of your DNA, your specific genetic identity that ***links you to every ancestor, as human life is transmitted from generation to generation***. Second, be aware of your pulse for a moment, your heart's rhythm that began 20 days after you were conceived in your mother's womb – a cadence that speeds up and slows down with the stages and events of life, but a heartbeat that, barring some medical emergency, has for most of us continued without ceasing for years, decades, literally millions and millions of times. And third, consider your breathing, another fundamental rhythm of life that is usually unconscious but absolutely essential. The air we breathe does not belong to us; it is a shared, common grant to every one of us, regardless of where, when, or how we live.

These basic realities of our life – prints, pulse, heartbeat – common to all but unique to each, ***are God's gift***. We did nothing to cause them, we simply receive them in stewardship. This awareness that life is a gift ... not an accident, not a coincidence, not a blind natural energy, but a purposeful and free gift of a loving Creator Who knows us each by name and calls us to eternal joy ... this awareness of gift is at the heart of the culture of life, as St. John Paul repeated so often. To know that each person is made in the very image of God – with the capacity to live, to know, and to love – is what takes us beyond mere natural respect for individuals and brings us to a supernatural, sacred responsibility for life, our own and that of others.

In the verses preceding the first reading we heard, Isaiah described the situation in his time: ***“distressed and starving they will wander; turning their gaze upward, then down to the earth, they will find only distress and darkness, the blackness of anguish, and will see nothing but night.”*** Those words certainly speak to the plight of many still today – distressed, hungry for truth and trust and security, unable to find

hope, seeing nothing but night. Hearing those words helps us appreciate the triumphant declaration that follows: ***“the people in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in the land of gloom a light has shone.”*** The Church uses these words at the Christmas Midnight Mass – for Jesus is that Light.

That is our certain faith; but St. John reminds us that the Light shines IN the darkness while history goes on; until Jesus returns, we must do the same, reflecting His light in the shadows and gloom. It is 50 years tomorrow / today that the Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in the U.S. and we rightly grieve the loss of some 60 million children – a third of two generations now. Though the Supreme Court returned the question of abortion to the states this past summer, the challenge remains, especially in MN, to inspire true respect for human life, not only regarding innocent life in the womb, but also the growing trend of euthanasia and assisted suicide; poverty; abuse; war and terrorism; pornography; indifference to the dignity of another. Responsible political engagement; direct service to those in need; and education in Catholic teaching on the life issues are necessary and valuable, but in the end, only prayer attuned to God’s grace can touch hearts to reverence His gift of life.

Because Christ died for every person, every child of His Father, we cannot become complacent, indifferent to the suffering of another, or choose only our own settled convenience and advantage, without emptying the Cross of its meaning, as Paul says. The Word of God makes clear that the Apostles were chosen, not for their own sake, but to be servants of the Gospel, to proclaim a love as vast as the heart of the merciful God. While we cannot of ourselves change the world, we remain free to choose how we will live in it. Even the least among us have their own fingerprints, heartbeat, and the gift of life breathed into them by God – and the voice of Jesus reminds us: ***“Whatever you do for the least, You do for Me.”***