

“Built Up in Respect for Life”

The Second Sunday after Epiphany - Presided by: Bp. Ariel P. Santos

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Cathedral of the King

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“Built Up in Respect for Life”
Sunday, January 15, 2017: The Second Sunday after Epiphany,
The Feast of the Lord, the Giver of Life
Jeremiah 31: 10 -17/ Psalm 10/1 Corinthians 15: 19 – 26/ Matthew 18: 1 – 5

Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

Today, we proclaim the sacredness of life – that God is the Author and Giver of Life. He is the Sustainer of all life. As clergy, we wear red today signifying our being one with the victims of the culture of death. This is the ill that our society is facing right now. God is the Source of all life. Since He is holy, since He is good, all life is sacred. It is not just our own life, but even those whom we think has no hope, the life of the least, the lonely, the afflicted, and the persecuted. They are precious in God’s sight.

God’s image and likeness that we have been given as a gift are the foundation of our life. The problem with us is that we seek life where there is no life. In a gospel story, the angel asked the women in the tomb who were looking for Jesus, “Why are you looking for life in the midst of death?” Sadly, we do this today. We look to people of power, to princes or to presidents for the sustenance of our lives. We look to celebrities, the rich and the famous; the powerful; the kings and the princes. Because of our lack of knowledge of the truth of our creation, we fall into the trap that Eve fell into, and it makes us vulnerable to deception. This deception is beautifully packaged to make it look good. “This is good for you, Eve. Bite!” The culture of death, divorce and lust are nicely packaged and this deceives us.

A song says, “Though this world, with devil spilled which threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph in us.” Death is the last enemy to be conquered and it will be conquered because God said so. According to statistics, 125,000 babies are aborted every single day worldwide. It makes an average of 5,208.33 per hour of babies aborted; 86.8 per minute and 1.45 every second. Every two seconds, three babies are killed. How quick it is to die every three seconds!

In the United States alone, 887 die a day in abortion, about 37 per hour and an average of one death every 97 seconds. These figures are not to overwhelm us, but it is to make us aware to hopefully stir us up to include in our prayers the helpless and those who are innocent and are being afflicted, persecuted and killed. Again, in the United States, there are 50% pregnancies that are unwanted, and 4 out of ten of those unwanted pregnancies end up in abortion. Twenty-two percent of all pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) end up in abortion. Somebody whispers in the ears of women that what is good for them is to get rid of their babies so that they will have a future and their future will not be interrupted. With regards to divorce, about 53% of marriages in the United States end up in divorce. In

Europe, Portugal, Luxemburg, and Czechoslovakia, it is more than 60%. In Belgium, it is 71%. The good thing that in Chile, there is only a 3% divorce rate. I happy about this report that in the United States, the divorce rate is dropping.

This is an ill of society. We belong to a society that embraces a culture of divorce. The truth is that it is not good for us. The truth is that abortion and divorce bring fear, guilt and anxiety. They bother our conscience. It brings turmoil not only on the individual, but also for children and loved ones affected whose lives are sacred and precious to God. What God gives to us is not fear because fear is not from God. God gives us life, wealth, welfare, not calamity because to God, all life is sacred, not scared.

In Genesis, it is replete with the words, “Then God said...” It is the Word of God that brought all things into being, and it sustains everything. The Amplified translation of Hebrews¹ says that the Son is upholding, maintaining, propelling all things and the universe by His powerful word. Everything that happens and that goes around is sustained by the power of His word. Another translation says, “By His own mighty word, He holds the universe together.” Our problem is that we think our word makes things happen. We think our understanding sustains the world and makes it go round. We do this in rebellion, and sadly, in vain.

When we justify what is right in our own eyes, we don’t hear God asking us, “Who told you?” When Adam was naked, he told God, “I was afraid and I was naked so I covered myself.” God said, “Who told you were naked? Who told you that this was good for you? Who told you that this is what you need to do in your life?” Was it a popular psychologist? A popular talk show host? A popular columnist? We need to ask ourselves, “How much of what we input in our minds and in our hearts is Kingdom principles?” How much is pop culture or psychobabble or saying of some popular guy? We look to the created rather than to the Creator.

In the gospel today, Jesus said that we need to humble ourselves and be like children that are teachable and dependent on Him. Jesus said, “Learn from Me. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, be like the youngest.” The disciples often argue about rank. James and John wanted the right and left hand place of Jesus. He tells them, “If you want to be great, be humble because if you humble yourselves, that is when you experience the kingdom of God. It is not so among you like what the Gentiles do who lord it over each other. They get themselves ahead at the expense of others. Take heed because it is not so among you.”

What about free will? Aren’t we given free will? Free will is given by God for us to willingly manifest the divine nature that we partake of. If we are robots, if we don’t have free will, then, we are not created in the image of God. God freely, willingly, voluntarily does good. This is what we have on the inside of us, the divine nature that we share with God. Free will is not a license to go against that nature.

In 1 Corinthians 8, St. Paul said that food doesn't make one better or worse. He warns us to be careful that our liberty (right) doesn't ruin the weak brother for whom Christ died. By sinning against our brother, by causing him to stumble, we actually don't sin against him, but we sin against Christ Himself, because our brother was purchased by Christ with His blood and his life is precious to Him. If what we do causes our brother to stumble, we will never do it again. We may think that what we are doing is nothing, but if it causes our brother to stumble, we are encouraged and commanded to sacrifice our rights, our privileges, and think about the building up of others.

Further, God is the Owner of all things. We don't have a right to cause anyone to stumble, to destroy them, to slander them or to just pull them down. We don't own anything - not our possessions and even our lives. Our lives belong to God. We are mere stewards. We have been entrusted with these things, and going further, we are accountable.

Romans 14:4 says, "Who are you to judge the servant of another (God's)?" Who are you to destroy the property of God? Who are you to slander, to put down another for whom Christ died and whose life is sacred and precious to Him and whom He loves? Stealing, killing and destroying is the work of the devil, not the children of God who share and who partake of God's divine nature. These things are not rights, but are sins and they are against the Divine nature in us.

Pro-choice is not just about abortion. Our proclamation of all life is sacred is not just about fighting abortion. It is going against or proclaiming against the love of self. Many times, we do what we want for pleasure, for ease, for convenience and from freedom from responsibility and the desire to be free from God's commandments and His authority.

We are not a Church that is pro-life. We are a pro-life Church. It is not a stance, a position, an opinion, but a vocation, a calling, and a commitment. Everything we do should be geared towards the enrichment of life – ours, hopefully last; others, first. All life is sacred. We are to take a firm stand against the killing, the affliction, the persecution of the innocent and the helpless - babies or otherwise. If we don't fight for the helpless, we are falling short of the glory of God. We are falling short of the Divine nature that we are supposed to be partakers of. In our treatment of the least or our lack of helping them, we do it unto Christ Himself. Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of My brothers, you do unto Me. Whatever you don't do for them or to them, you don't do it for Me or to Me."

Causing the little ones to stumble is seriously condemned. What about killing them? What about taking their lives? This is even more serious. Psalm 10 talks about defending the helpless, crying out to God for their protection and justice for them. We prayed in the Collect not just for those innocent, lest we have hate in our hearts, but also for those who offend them because they are blinded; those who kill them and are involved in their affliction. Maybe they need rebuke or strong correction, but their life is precious in God's

sight also. God is the Giver of life; the Defender and the Deliverer of those whose lives are oppressed.

We, as partakers of His divine nature, are to do whatever it takes to promote life. We should uphold, sustain, and enrich lives. We are given the free will so that we can exercise and choose to respect all life and help the weak and accept them. We are not to put them down or to marginalized them, but to accept them, to make a commitment to help them – the afflicted, the humble, the least, the persecuted, the immature, and even those who offend us because their lives are sacred. I am not talking about condoning idleness, but all life is sacred, and our God does not will that any one soul perish or any life is lost. He wants us to freely choose, to freely waive rights and our privileges for the sake of upholding another's life. Even if in our eyes that it is the worst life, remember that God gave us life and when that life was damaged and vandalized, God sent His Son out of love. He gave His own life for a hostile people, a people who don't even love Him. These are people who are not likeable and not lovable.

We need to be secure in this love of God. God's life is abundant. We don't need to suppress other's lives to secure our own. We don't need to step on others to enrich ourselves because there is enough abundance of this life to go around. God is more than enough. Scriptures says, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Another translation says, "...shall all be given life." There is enough for everyone. We don't need to hoard, to panic and be anxious about our life being threatened. We have an abundant life. If we just pause and make an inventory of our lives, and count our blessings, most likely what would happen is we would pray less of our needs and more of the needs of others, which are more legitimate.

Romans 8 says that the anxious longing of all creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. We are all sons of God and all of creation, including some human beings eagerly long for liberation from their bondages, from slavery to corruption. It is time for us to manifest our being sons of God.

I have been calling for another EDSA Revolution. This is not a political one. EDSA stands for Epifanio Delos Santos; epiphany of the saints; revelation of the sons of God. This is us and we should be the billboards shouting and proclaiming life. All creation is waiting for us to rise up and manifest the Divine nature of our God in us and through us for this is the way it is in the kingdom of our God.