

HOMILY

The Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

Respect Life Sunday

October 3-4, 2008

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Davison, Michigan

What are your thoughts when you first wake up in the morning? *What am I going to wear today? Is the bathroom free? What's the weather like? How much longer can I stay in bed?* When do you think about what life is all about or why we are doing all this or why are we here?

Those deeper questions about the meaning of life come on rare occasions. We all need to stop and ask ourselves those questions once in a while as individuals and as the Church. *Why are we here? Why are we doing this? What's the bottom line?* In our text from Matthew, we are encouraged to ask the questions: *What is our ultimate purpose for living? What is God looking for from us?* That's the bottom line—what is God looking for?

Today in the Gospel we hear a story about a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard pulls out all the stops. Thanks to his stewardship, the vineyard has been provided with the best of everything needed to produce the best of fruit. The owner sends servants to collect the harvest from the tenants; but instead of fruit—beautiful and tasty grapes in abundance—the servants are treated shamefully. They are rejected and killed.

Instead of a harvest of the finest grapes, they only have wild grapes. In the Bible, wild grapes mean very bitter grapes. Grapes that rot your teeth. Grapes that make you want to vomit. Just terrible tasting grapes—repulsive. Not just mediocre or inferior, but bitter. Not acceptable at all. Grapes of no value to anyone.

What kind of grapes is God looking for? God is looking for the right ordering of relationships and resources. God made this world to work, and it works only in the right ordering of relationships and resources. It works when people learn to cooperate instead of compete. It works when each of us learns to love instead of dominate. It involves our relationship with God. It involves our relationship with the earth. It involves our relationships with each other and with ourselves. When any of these relationships and resources is broken, weakened, distorted, or neglected, that's when injustice occurs. That's when the world doesn't work.

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What is currently happening in the bailout is just one sign of the state of America's vineyard. Are there any better words to use than "greed" and "hypocrisy" as corporate heads want to privatize profits but socialize losses? By the way, did you know every child born into the world begins life saddled with a \$175,000 debt, and that was before the one trillion dollar hijacking of Main Street by Wall Street?

Today is *Respect Life Sunday*. At this very moment in history, when we have the greatest capacity to sustain life and enrich the experience of pregnancy, we have developed an attitude of callousness and indifference to life within the womb. Even as we mourn the death of so many innocents, efforts are being made in Michigan to approve of embryonic cell research this November with Proposal 2 on the ballot. Each of us needs to do our homework and to learn why approving of embryonic cell research is not compatible with being a believer in the Gospel of Life.

On the other side of life, efforts are openly being mounted to place the lives of the elderly and the infirm in jeopardy. Euthanasia is no longer an unspeakable word. There are those who would have us believe that it is an act of mercy.

Never before have people of this country been so assaulted by the tragic insertion of pornography and violence into our airwaves, our television, our movie screens, and our computers. These human bodies of ours, that with which we see and touch, are the temples of the Holy Spirit. In the vineyard of our world, persons have been reduced to objects and sadly violated. No wonder each time Pope John Paul II visited our country as a father concerned about our souls, he spoke about how we Americans have slipped into a culture of death. Today, the spiritual foundations of our nation are in peril and, God forbid, we are in danger of losing the vineyard that we have been put in charge of.

In his classic work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon stated the reasons for the downfall of mighty Rome as being the rapid increase of divorce belittling the sanctity of the home, higher and higher taxes while the public

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money was being wasted, a mad craze for pleasure which became more and more violent, amassing brutal, gigantic armaments of war while the nation was destroyed internally, and the decline of faith fading into mere formality. Sound familiar?

Jesus said that from those who have been entrusted with much, much will be expected. We have been given so much. We have the best of everything. What are we doing with God's vineyard? Look about you. If he were to come today, would he receive a harvest of sweet, succulent grapes or a harvest of wild, bitter grapes?

