

# 25 Years of *The Gospel of Life*



This year the Church celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This prophetic document was written by Pope John Paul II to reaffirm the value and inviolability of every human life and to appeal to all people to respect, protect, love, and serve every human life. The following is a brief overview of this important document.

The Gospel of Life is at the *heart* of Jesus' saving message to the world. Through the Incarnation and birth of Christ, God reveals to us the dignity of all human life. Human life, as a gift of God, is sacred and inviolable. The Son of God has united himself with

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every human being and desires for us to share eternal life with him. For this reason, direct attacks on human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, are always unacceptable. Yet, sadly we see new and expanding threats to human life emerging on an alarming scale. These new threats to life are often justified, protected, and even promoted by our laws and culture.

Not only must human life not be taken, but it must be protected with loving concern. Each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, and we reflect his glory in the world. God made the human person with the capacity to love and reason and share in a relationship with himself, the Creator. The human person bears an indelible imprint of God and is the pinnacle of all creation. The source of our dignity is not only linked to our creation by God, but to our final end and destiny to spend eternity with the Father. By accepting Christ as our Savior through the ministry of the

Church, despite our sinfulness, we can begin to share in eternal life even now.

Despite the grave threats to human life in the modern world, we, as the People of God, are called to place our faith in Jesus, the “Word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). As Christians, we have received the full truth about human life as proclaimed by the very person of Jesus. In sharing in the lowliest and most vulnerable conditions of human life—even death on a cross—Jesus shows us that life is *always good*. The true meaning of our lives is found in giving and receiving love. It is only through this understanding of a sincere gift of self that human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance.

God holds the lives of all people in his gentle and loving care, giving meaning and value to any sufferings that we bear. Even within the

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mystery which surrounds suffering and death, these experiences can become saving events as we unite them with Christ's own sacrifice. By making human life the instrument of our salvation, the Son of God shows us the priceless value of human life.

Although the roots of violence against life are not new—going all the way back to Genesis, when Cain took the life of his brother Abel—our modern world is now suffering under a culture of death. Scientific and technological advances and an increasingly secularized world have led to an eclipse of the value of human life. However, respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of the human person and his integral development. We must reject systems of structuralized sin which value efficiency and productivity over human persons.

Governments and international institutions promote abortion and euthanasia as marks of progress and freedom. But this is a false and perverse understanding in which freedom is equated with absolute individualism. True freedom is inherently relational, recognizing that God has entrusted us to one another. As cultures and societies fail to recognize these objective truths, everything becomes relative, and all principles are called into question—even the fundamental right to life. However,

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the blood of Christ's sacrifice remains our constant hope. Christ's gift of himself on the Cross reveals how precious life truly is and gives us the strength to commit ourselves to building a *culture of life*. Christ's blood, shed for us, promises that in God's plan death will be no more, and life will be victorious.

Society as a whole must respect, defend and



promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life. Each life is a gift from God and ultimately belongs to him. He has sole authority over life and death. We are therefore called to reverence and love every human person, loving our neighbors as ourselves. It is our responsibility to care for and protect human life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable among us.

Having received the gift of the Gospel of Life, we are the people of life and a people for life. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of Life to the world. *To proclaim Jesus is to proclaim life itself.* Gratitude and joy at the incomparable dignity of the human person impel us to bring the Gospel of Life to the hearts of all people and make it penetrate every part of society. In every child which is born, and in every person who lives or dies, we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ.