



Respect Life Month in the Year of Faith

This October we observe Respect for Life *Month* in the *Year of Faith*. It is a thought-provoking coincidence, for our respect for life flows from what we *believe*, but it is grounded in what we *know*.

Science helps establish what we know. From the science of genetics, Pope Francis has reminded us, we *know* that “the genetic code of the person is present at the moment of conception” and we *know* that at no stage of its existence could this tiny creature be or become anything else but a human being. We also *know* that abortion, in the Pope’s words, does “not allow further progress in the development” of what is “already a human being.”

What do we *believe* about what we know? To the knowledge of genetics, faith adds two foundational truths that go beyond the reach of scientific inquiry. First of all, we believe that any and every being with a human genetic code is made in the image of God and, as the *Catechism* teaches, “is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life.” In a recent address to Catholic doctors Pope Francis noted that faith enables us to see what the geneticist cannot: “the imprint of the creative work of God, from the first instant of . . . conception.”

From Jesus’ words at the Last Judgment the Pope derives a second truth which belief bestows upon

knowledge. “Within the fragile human being,” Pope Francis said, “each one of us is invited to recognize,” not only the image of God, but also “the face of the Lord.” Every unborn child in the womb as well as every elderly person at the end of his days “has the face of Jesus Christ.” It is the face of the baby who had to flee King Herod’s murderous rejection at birth; it is the face of the one with no place to lay his head who drank the bitter cup of hostility and humiliation; it is the face of him who sank down into death without dignity in the loneliness of the cross. In this face faith sees the meaning of every human face. Human life is sacred because it is meant to see God face to face.

Because we *know* (apart from faith) that “all men are created equal,” we have no principled way to value one human life more highly than another. Our laws used to reflect this truth. Then came legalized abortion and assisted suicide, and unwelcome human life became disposable across the board. In our time what we believe must come to the rescue of what we know.

Belief builds on knowledge. As the *Catechism* teaches, “We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.” Human life cannot be discarded. The New Evangelization must call our world back to this truth, Pope Francis says; and this means “going against the current, paying personally” for what we believe. “Today what is needed is courage—to testify with courage to the Gospel of Life.”

(Bishop Cary’s reflections on the Immigration question will continue in his next column.)