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Dear Parishioners,

October has come around again—the month we dedicate to Respect for Life. It’s worth taking a minute to remember why we do.

Seventeen centuries ago St. Cyril of Jerusalem raised questions that ask to be answered in every human heart. “Who prepared the cavity of the womb for the procreation of children? Who breathed life into the inanimate fetus within? Who knit us together bones and sinews and clothed us with skin and flesh . . . ? How is it that the child, in growing, becomes an adolescent, and from an adolescent is transformed into a young man, then an adult and finally an old man, without anyone being able to identify the precise day on which the change occurred?”

Cyril knew the answers to his questions were to be found in the Psalmist’s hymn of praise to the God of Israel: “Lord, You have probed me; You know me. . . . You formed my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. . . . [M]y bones were not hidden from You when I was being fashioned in secret . . . as in the depths of the earth. . . . [M]y days were shaped before one came to be” (Ps. 139: 1, 13, 15, 16). In a similar vein this same God revealed to the Prophet Jeremiah how he came to be: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born I dedicated you” (Jeremiah 1:5). These passages led Pope Benedict XVI to echo what St. Cyril was getting at: “The arrival of each person in the world is always a new creation.”

This simple truth has wide-ranging consequences. First of all, says St. John Paul II, “It is necessary . . . to recognize the essential quality that distinguishes every human creature as that of being made in the image and likeness of the Creator Himself” — a being “destined in the plan of redemption to be clothed in the dignity of a child of God.”

From this first consequence flows a second, Pope Benedict says: “. . . life is the first good received from God and is fundamental to all others; to guarantee the right to life for all and in an equal measure for all is the duty upon which the future of humanity depends.”

To fulfill that duty in part we observe Respect for Life Month. We do so because, as Pope Benedict reminds us, “There is a problem we cannot get around: no one can dispose of human life”—whether by abortion, by physician-assisted suicide, or by euthanasia. “The human being is not a disposable object, but every single individual represents God’s presence in the world.” Let us strive to help our country respect His presence in the lives of those whose dignity most needs defense.

In the Lord of Life,