



Deacon Steve Szmuto's
Reflection on the Sunday Readings
October 6 – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2: 2-4 Psalm 195: 1-2,
6-9
2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14 Luke 17: 5-10

Today is *Respect Life Sunday*, the beginning of a month in which we pray, reflect and act on the sanctity of human life, in all its manifestations, from womb to tomb, whereby we acknowledge the great gift that God has bestowed on us. We are called to work for

the preservation and protection of all human life, from the unborn child, to the poor and suffering, to those at the end of life, and in every moment in between. As disciples, we must work for the protection of all men and women, even for those we do not find particularly lovable. Our secular society challenges us in that it has sought to define human life, not based on our essence as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, but as a measure of utility or productivity.

Abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, economic self-sufficiency and similar matters are often couched in euphemistic terms as quality-of-life, the preservation of dignity, or even ultimate justice. And as society defines and limits the definitions of what it means to be human, some are determined to be as undeserving of the life that God has bestowed upon them. I am reminded of Tolkien's masterpiece, "The Lord of the Rings," where Frodo said to the Wizard Gandalf, that he wished that the evil creature Gollum was not killed by Bilbo, when he had his chance. Gandalf replied to Frodo that, "*Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment.*" Fidelity to the preservation of human life and the salvation of souls is a hallmark of Christianity. To rise above the base impulses of our humanity requires faith in God, who alone sits as the arbiter of human existence. Faith, and its incumbent responsibilities, is never easy, and yet it is that for which we are called.

Today's readings deal with the gift of faith and the duties imposed on disciples by the acceptance of God's gift. We often believe that, by virtue of our faith, we are somehow immune from the obligations of earthly life. In addressing the crowds, Jesus told us that this was not so. To place his words in context, Jesus spoke these words while journeying to Jerusalem, a journey that would lead to his suffering and death on the cross. He reminded his disciples that God's grace is sheer gift, and that our *duty*, by virtue of that grace and our embrace of it, is to serve God and others, just as he did. We are called to accept our obligation to service in discipleship, just as he willingly accepted the mission entrusted to him by the Father.

Earlier, the disciples called upon Jesus to: "*Increase our faith.*" Traveling to Jerusalem with Our Lord, perhaps they had begun to understand the rigorous demands of discipleship. Jesus reminded them that even a tiny amount of faith (trust in God) could result in great things. I haven't been able to uproot any mulberry trees in my backyard (probably a good thing in the human sense); I suppose we all have our work to do in terms of our faith.

Saint Paul called upon the members of the early Church to follow the call of the Spirit as a source of strength to meet the demands of discipleship: "*I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.*" (2 Timothy 1: 6-7)

Ours is not the faith of the timid; by virtue of our Baptism, we are called to be servants of Christ and in that service, soldiers in his mission of salvation – not soldiers in the militaristic sense, but rather in our obedience and submission to his will. We must turn to Christ, whose victory over death was won by the paschal sacrifice. Nourished by prayer and the Eucharist, we must follow him to champion the Gospel message.

Deacon Steve Szmuto