

The Dignity of Human Relationships

In this month of October, I am presenting a series of talks and articles about Respect Life issues. This week's discussion is about the sacredness of human relationships, which can never be separated from respecting and protecting life from conception to natural death.

In fact, the same human dignity, that we proclaim should be protected in the womb, requires that human beings treat each other with their inherent dignity in whatever state of life they live. Parents should love and respect their children. Adult children have responsibility to cherish their aging parents. Men and women should treat each other with dignity and love. The deepest levels of intimacy reflect the power of sexuality to express true commitment and recognize the power of sexuality to give life. We all must care for others in need because they are our brothers and sisters.

These are all woven into the same tapestry of human existence. If we actually strive to live this, then many other issues would fade. There would be far fewer unintended pregnancies so the issue of abortion would diminish. We would have far fewer people scarred by violence in marriage. There would be far less trafficking of human beings. Children would grow up healthier and more secure. This world would be so different.

If we are honest, we have a long way to go.

Just a few years ago Pope Francis uttered these words of challenge: "It is important today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard, for it is a voice of fraternity and love, which brings out the best in each person and in each society. Such cooperation is a powerful resource in the battle to eliminate global forms of slavery..." Pope Francis was speaking of human trafficking which is a global scourge. This degradation of men and women (mostly girls and women) is a sin that cries to heaven. It not only violates human freedom, it often leads to forced abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, and early death. It violates the most basic norms of human sexuality. If we respect life, we respect the dignity of all from conception to death. The same lack of dignity is found in so many other areas of life.

We are a society that labels and often sees individuals as a means to an end. In the popular culture, we see this in the entertainment world.

Nearly forty years ago, the movie *Risky Business* was released. It was the first starring role for Tom Cruise. He played a high school senior, desperate to make money to buy back items stolen from his house, before his parents returned from a vacation. Through a series of circumstances, he ended up operating a bordello (to use an old term) out of his house.

There is a scene in the movie which is especially cringe worthy, not because anything explicit is shown but because of the values it represents. Joel (Cruise's character) is trying to drum up business for his one-night enterprise. He tells a friend, "You went out last week with her - two tickets to the movie - gas fare - dinner - You were in for thirty bucks. And you got nothing. For my service, you spend fifty bucks and it's guaranteed."

What is cringe worthy about it is the idea that the only reason a young man would date a girl is to use her. There is nothing about liking each other. Nothing about getting to know each other as persons. It assumes that people date so that they can "use" each other. Both young men are treating sexuality as a commodity to be bought and sold. The young woman is seen as a means to an end. How selfish!

It is a message found in many popular movies and television shows. It is crippling. Many people have been so hurt by other's selfishness. I know what I am speaking about from my experiences in ministry. I know too many stories.

What can we do? Perhaps the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John can point us in the right direction. "I came that they may have life and have it in abundance." It seems to me that this summarizes what our lives as Christians should be. We are meant to give life. We are meant to protect life. We can teach our children that we give life or damage life by our words and our actions.

Protecting physical life and protecting the life of the soul, along with the human heart, go hand in hand. A culture of life must be lived in our everyday relationships, even as we deal with some specific issues and challenges. Then we can truly share in Christ's mission to give life and give it abundantly.

Let me end with a quote from Saint Pope John Paul II, “A person’s rightful due is to be treated as an object of love not as an object for use.”