

100508 RESPECT LIFE & CREATION & TRUTH

Truth and Sister Briege & Oprah Winfrey

In August and September, deacons had the opportunity to preach on the sanctity of life. Well, today is Respect Life Sunday throughout the United States. My homily isn't directly about specific life issues. In fact, I have put a title at the top of my homily and it has these words: RESPECT LIFE AND CREATION AND TRUTH.

To get us started – let me read the opening and closing paragraphs from a statement just issued by Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia. He is the chairman of the U.S. Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities. The cardinal states:

On October 5, 2008, Catholics across the United States will again celebrate Respect Life Sunday. Throughout the month of October, Catholic parishes and organizations will sponsor conferences, prayer services, and opportunities for public witness, as well as events to raise funds for programs assisting those in need. Such activities are integral to the Church's ongoing effort to help build a culture in which every human life without exception is respected and defended. These activities address a broad range of moral and policy issues including care of persons with disabilities, those nearing the end of their lives and those with serious physical and mental disabilities. The cardinal went on to talk about embryonic stem cell research and abortion and this horrible Freedom of Choice Act. I can't get into it today – but in preparation for your November vote, I ask you to read, reflect and form your conscience on all such matters.

This includes the Arizona Prop 102 Marriage Amendment Act that I mentioned in a recent sermon.

The cardinal closes by saying, “In this Respect Life Month, let us rededicate ourselves to defending the basic rights of those who are weakest and most marginalized: the poor, the homeless, the innocent unborn, and the frail and elderly who need our respect and our assistance.... Let us build a culture of life.”

You know dear friends, recently, I was involved with someone who has come to a crossroads in their life. This person is facing a decision that determines whether that person can continue to practice the Catholic faith given certain issues this person is facing. At a critical point in our meeting, the person said to me, “Do you think the Catholic Church is going to sort of modernize its thinking, that it will catch up with the times?” That person faces the struggle that all of us face when it comes to living up to truth. Can I define truth as I see it? Of if you say I can't do that – will the organization be willing to change its position so it will mold to my thinking? That is like saying that truth is relative – and if truth is relative, then there is no truth.

That's what this Respect Life Sunday and this month put before us. Are we to be formed by society and the New Age? Or are we resolute in defending even the least among us... the poor and disenfranchised? Those that society may consider dispensable?

If you happened to read the Entrance Antiphon in the missal for today, here are the opening words for this Mass. “O Lord, you have given everything its place in the world, and no one can make it otherwise. For it is your creation, the heavens and the earth and the stars. You are the Lord of all.” Would those be your words?

A few of you may have heard this story – it’s about a nun named Sr. Briege McKenna – and about Oprah Winfrey. As briefly as I can – let me share this New Age story with you. Sr. Briege is an author, a world-traveled nun with a powerful devotion to Jesus and to a healing ministry. I have personally attended her talks and I tell you that she is a holy, loving nun. One of her well-known books is this one – it’s called MIRACLES DO HAPPEN. It’s about Sr. Briege and her journey of faith. Most especially – it’s about Sister being healed from a crippling arthritis. This was an arthritis that forced Briege to be put into casts each night – a painful way of forcing the body to not do what the disease was doing in her feet and legs.

After years of suffering, one day at Mass, after the Eucharist while Sr. Briege was in prayer – Jesus ‘touched’ her and she said she was peeled like a banana. What was peeled was the disease as an immediate healing and relief was given to her. Her story has sold thousands of books – and Briege herself has since gone around the world, praying for and in certain cases being involved in healing.

Now, you likely know that the Oprah Winfrey staff is always looking for books and authors to promote.

Somehow they came upon Sr. McKenna's story and they invited her to come on the show. When I listened to Sr. Briege tell this story – she looked out at us and she said, “You know – I never heard of Oprah before and I didn't have a clue who she was.” So Sister said she would talk to her bishop in Florida and let them know.

The bishop told Briege that Oprah was a very popular TV personality – but that she was one of the New Age people. She promoted a form of 'religion' packaged in New Age ways of thinking. The bishop told Sister to be careful – but that he thought it might help a lot of people to hear this witness and testimony.

Much longer story shortened – Sr. Briege spent an hour before the Blessed Sacrament and attended Mass the morning of the show. She went on the show and here is a summary of what happened. After the opening and small talk, they get into the discussion of Sr. Briege and the book.

Oprah shared about Sister Briege. In so many words: I hear you are a woman of God... that you are a holy woman and that you have been involved in lot of healing work... They tell me you are a powerful woman... Your book is a testament to your faith and what you believe. Oprah said something like: Now Sister Briege, isn't it true that it doesn't really matter whether we use the name Jesus or some other name... that it doesn't matter which path someone walks – as long as they are doing a good walk?

Sister Brieger told us she whispered a quick silent prayer and then responded: “Indeed it does matter what we do... and whose name we use. His name is Jesus... and at the holy name of Jesus, every knee shall bend.”

These are words from Scripture. Not words from the New Age. Jesus came as a human being – to share with us the reality of God’s participation in life. Jesus came to this earth to walk in and to enjoy the beauty of God’s creation... Jesus came to share with us something that can’t be repackaged into billions of individual ideas. Jesus came to share Truth (with a capital T) – and Jesus beckons us to pray, to study His Holy Bible, to associate with those in the Church who are also involved in the search for Truth.

Today, is the New Age closer to your thinking? Do you accept that all beliefs are okay and that these things don’t really matter? Or are you closer to the reality of Jesus present in the Eucharist? Do you believe the Church should get in step with modern thinking? Or do you honor all life from conception to natural death?

Today is Life Chain Sunday. At 2:30 -- Christians from many churches will meet at the Beeline Highway and Main Street. We will spend one hour – one quiet, prayerful hour in solidarity for life. Our focus may be on abortion but it is really a statement about God’s supremacy over all of life. Please – husbands and wives and teens and children. Join us at 2:30 for one hour for life. Thank you.