

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

St. John 2:1-11 (Historic Lectionary and Series C)

"In the beginning, God created" (Gen. 1). That's who God is. The One who creates. Outside of Himself. The fact that He creates outside of Himself reveals that great attribute of His, Love. *"God is love"* (1 Jn. 4:8) and God makes man that He may have someone to love.

That work of God continues today. As we say in the Catechism, *"I believe that God has made me and all creatures."* The fact that He has made me means that already, and apart from anything I have done or failed to do, He loves me. The fact that you are made, that you are God's creature, means that you are loved by Him. Apart from any merit or worthiness in you.

Each Person of the Holy Trinity creates, and so each Person of that Trinity loves: loves you, loves me, loves all of humanity. Every time we confess the Nicene Creed, we affirm this. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One *"by whom all things were made."* And the Holy Spirit is *"the Lord and giver of life."* Which means, then, that life is not first of all ours; it is God's. The life that we have is given by God. The life that others have is given by God. They are blessings from God, never curses, even when they may be crosses. So we dare not take our own life, nor should we take the life of another person. The life that God gave is His to take, and His alone.

In the Gospel appointed for today, the Second Sunday after Epiphany, after our Lord Jesus changed water into wine, St. John tells us, *"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory"* (Jn 2:11). The divine nature of Jesus, that He is God in the flesh, is revealed, manifested, *"epiphanized."* But there is more to the glory of Jesus than just showing divine power, magnificence, and splendor. God's glory. An old prayer describes God as the One who declares His *"almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity"* (Collect, Trinity 11, TLH). That is what we see in Jesus today. He does nothing for His own benefit. His miracles are not to draw attention to Himself, but to show mercy and pity to others. That is how His glory is manifested.

And it is no accident that He does this at a wedding. Scripture begins with a wedding, the marriage of Adam and Eve, and it ends with a wedding, the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. What is the significance of the Lord Jesus doing His first miracle at a wedding? Because one of the chief purposes for marriage is the generation of new life, the new creation of children. But even where a marriage does not result in children, God also instituted marriage between one man and one woman for them to live in radical, devoted love and service to each other, a devoted, sacrificial love that would mysteriously foreshadow the sacrificial, faithful love between Christ and His bride the Church, that is, between the One through Whom all things were made and we who have been made.

God's glory, then, is not in the raw demonstration of power. God's glory is in self-giving, in giving of Himself to mankind. As St. Irenaeus put it, "*The glory of God is a living man.*"

Earlier, I said that the lives others have is given by God; blessings from Him, never curses, even when they are crosses. Caring for others can be challenging. And not merely physically or financially, but spiritually. When confronted with the needs of another person, striving to meet them often must come at the expense of what we would like to do, what we hoped and dreamed for ourselves. God calls us to bear these crosses both so that we can be His love for the person in need, and also to drive us out of our own selfishness. The cross shapes us to be like Christ.

The great civil rights cause of our day is justice for people in need who cannot help themselves. From the tiniest human beings used for experimentation, to defenseless babies struck down by abortion, to mothers who feel they have nowhere else to turn and have known only a church that condemns without helping, to people brought low by illness and disease and regarded by society as without value, we are surrounded by helpless people in need. This Friday (Jan. 22, 2010), Lutherans from around the country will join others to give public witness to the sanctity of human life. That is vitally important. But whether you join the public demonstrations or not, your life each day is replete with opportunities to give witness to the sanctity of human life. The glory of Christ, the love of God is manifested as you help your spouse who struggles with dementia, as you care for your children, when you prepare food for a new mother, when you visit someone in a nursing home, when you show respect to your fellow traveler on the road.

These noble and good things are obscure, often not seen by others, but God sees, loves, and rejoices in them. Yet too often, despite the correct position on life issues such as abortion, we have not shown respect, care and compassion on the lives of the human beings right in front of us, in our homes and church and neighborhood. We come before God today first with a prayer of confession, asking Him yet again to demonstrate His glory in showing mercy and pity. And then, we humbly ask that He would use us to demonstrate His glory, as we show mercy and pity to others.

In the beginning, God created. He still creates, still shows His love and glory to His creatures. Now He who reddened water into wine comes to us in the wine of His life-giving blood. May that wine renew His life within us, forgiving us, healing us, and enabling us to bear witness to the sanctity of human life in everything that we say and do.

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