

## **We are all created in God's image**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When does human life begin? When I was a biology major in college, this could have been a question on an embryology exam. It has an easy answer. Life begins at conception. Although some people unfairly criticize religion as being unscientific, this one scientific fact supports our belief that life must be protected from its very beginning.

I often say something that I know to be true: I once was just two cells old. That was my life at its very beginning — immediately after I inherited my mother's DNA and my father's DNA to form my own DNA. When I was only a day old — and still in the womb — I wasn't yet the person who I am now. But I wasn't that person when I was 21 years old either. Still, the truth is, I became "me" when I was conceived, complete with my own unique genetic makeup and potential.

So is human life worth protecting? This is where the discussion becomes more theological. Human life is a gift from God. It begins when parents participate in God's creative activity, ideally through intimate love. In Scripture, we are told that God knew us even before we were formed in the womb (see Jeremiah 1:5). We also are told that we are created in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:27). Like God, we are able to think, love, know and reflect. We also are made to have a soul — one that is destined for eternity. Because of our belief, we demand that human life deserves protection.

But what about our non-theological friends? Should they be left off the hook if they do not believe in God — and therefore do not believe that life is God's gift? Certainly not! Even if someone does not believe in God, this person can still know that human life is a special and unique continuum that begins with conception — as science has confirmed — and is worth defending. This truth stands whether or not one believes in God. I am grateful to pro-life atheists and agnostics who comprehend the value of human life and understand that killing one innocent human life puts us all in jeopardy of being discarded when we aren't useful or when our existence becomes bothersome to the aspirations of others.

Today, we are witnessing some of the disturbing results of going down that slippery slope. There is a growing movement to grant legal rights allowing people to kill either themselves or others by euthanasia. Once it is permissible to destroy the most innocent of life — an embryo — it then becomes easier to believe that a human being whose life is difficult, in pain, taxing the medical system, causing disruption in the personal lives of others or not contributing to the material and social good of society can — or even should — be put to death. And this killing is all done under the guise of "compassion."

Abortion and euthanasia are tentacles of the culture of death and darkness that has a great disrespect and disregard for human life. Yet, as followers of Jesus, we live under his Gospel telling us that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). And we will continue to respond with the culture of life because we trust in Jesus who said, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Our faith in Jesus requires us to respect all human life: the unborn and elderly citizens; our own children and undocumented children; the innocent and those who are on death row. Like us, all of them are made in God's image and equally loved by God. This is why Jesus taught us to live a different way — the sacrificial way of faith, hope and love.

So what should we do? As Christians we must join with people of other faiths — and even people of no faith — to say, “We stand for life.” We stand together, arm in arm, with other people who know the truth about human life. It starts at conception. It is good by its very nature. It demands protection. And if we don't protect it at the beginning, people will always attempt to extend the boundaries of when life can legally be destroyed.

And so on January 19, I will once again unite with more than 100,000 people at the March for Life in Washington D.C. I will join with people from the Diocese of Greensburg and around the nation, and we will peacefully lift up our voices and prayers and say: “No” to Roe v. Wade; “No” to death by abortion; “No” to a culture of disrespect and disregard for the life of anyone. But more than that, I want to say, “Yes.” “Yes” to God (we are created in His image); “Yes” to reason (life begins at conception); and “Yes” to life. It is a gift, after all. And it is good. “God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good (Genesis 1:31).

May God protect our unborn children, help parents who find themselves with troubled pregnancies, and move our lawmakers to defend and support life from conception until its natural death — and every moment in between.

Your brother in Christ,

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Bishop of Greensburg