**HOMILY NOTES - 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (13th October, 2024)**

**Support Life Sunday 2024
*“Every person matters ... always"***

**Readings:**

**Wisdom 7:7-11**

The “spirit of Wisdom” is a gift from God, something that is to be prayed for. It is more precious than wealth, health or beauty. It is more than mere “knowledge” or “information” that one might derive by means of human calculation or technical ability. Rather, it follows upon an openness towards God, a desire to know God and to do God’s will. Paragraph 11 of *Dignitas Infinita*[[1]](#footnote-1)reminds us that being created in God’s image means that we “represent God in the world and are also called to cherish and nurture the world.” This highlights an important aspect of the spirit of Wisdom.

**Psalm 89(90):12-17**

“Make us know the shortness of our life, that we may gain wisdom of heart.”

Awareness of the finite nature of our earthly existence focuses us on what is most important in life. Wealth, health and beauty fade into obscurity when we focus on God’s love for us and for every other living person. God’s love is the source of our real joy. By asking God to make the work of our hands prosper, the psalmist reinforces the importance of human work and action in support of life and justice while reinforcing, at the same time, our utter reliance on God’s grace.

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

The word of God: God’s self-revelation in (1) the Sacred Scriptures and (2) in Jesus Christ. This word can penetrate one’s inmost self, knowing us better than we know ourselves. To God, who sees all, we must render an account of our lives. How do the reflections and thoughts of our hearts marry up with God’s wisdom and vision for humankind and all of creation?

**Mark 10:17-30**

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This question reminds us that human life is not merely our existence here and now in the circumstances of the present moment, an echo of the Psalmist’s prayer above (Psalm 89(90):12-17). For each person there is a *telos*, a goal which is “life to the full” (John 10:10; cf. John 17:13).

The phrase “eternal life” occurs at the beginning and end of the gospel reading (v. 10 & v. 30), forming an *inclusio*. Eternal life is promised to those who leave all for Jesus’ sake and “for the sake of the gospel” (10:30). (The concept of “life” is a major theme in John’s Gospel, occurring nearly forty times; “eternal life” occurs seventeen times.)

The particular commandments mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel of the day all concern the respect owed to others because of their innate human dignity. By obeying these commandments, the rich man shows himself to be a person of moral principle.

However, a full human life is not a matter simply of obeying the commandments; it cannot be earned by human achievement. More is demanded of us. Equally, living a full human life involves more than the *avoidance* of certain behaviours as spelled out by the particular commandments listed in today’s Gospel. In looking into and seeing the man’s inmost self (Hebrews 4: 12-23), Jesus recognises that his actions, good as they are, fall short – they lack a commitment to meet ‘the poor’ at their point of need.

Behind the rich man’s sadness lies his disproportionate attachment to his great wealth rather than God’s wisdom (Wisdom 7:7-11); a fundamentally mis-directed commitment to something other than a genuine concern for the needs of those on the margins – “the weak and those less endowed with power” (*Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 1) – ultimately, a failure to support life.

**Brief Notes on *Dignitas Infinita***

The Declaration “*Dignitas Infinita – On Human Dignity*” (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, April 2024) emphasises that every human being possesses an infinite dignity by virtue of them simply being. Human dignity is not something granted by the state. It cannot be taken away or obliterated because the infinite dignity that belongs to every individual is not contingent on a person’s circumstances. Even gross moral failure or evil conduct does not deprive anyone of their fundamental, infinite dignity as a person “made in the image and likeness of God” (*Dignitas Infinita*, paragraphs 1, 6) .

That said, there are many factors (such as poverty, injustice, war, slavery, sexual exploitation…) which militate against the full realisation of a person’s ontological dignity. Explaining this, *Dignitas Infinita* speaks of three further aspects of human dignity (paragraph 7): **moral dignity**, **social dignity** and **existential dignity**.[[2]](#footnote-2) Seeking to promote and uphold the fundamental dignity of every person, regardless of their social, moral, mental or physical status, is to “support life.”

The good of society depends on a commitment by all to uphold the infinite dignity of every person, especially those who are most vulnerable and defenceless. It is not to be confused with the individualistic assertion of ‘rights’, as though human dignity is merely a matter of personal preference or choice.

A commitment to “support life” needs to be grounded in this notion of infinite human dignity, something which each person receives from God regardless of his or her mental state, health, or perceived “usefulness”.

The task of upholding the infinite dignity of persons in its different forms may seem daunting. It is hard to enter the kingdom of God. “In that case who can be saved?” Jesus gazed at the disciples and said, “For humans it is impossible, but not for God.”

Finally, *Dignitas Infinita* reminds us that all life is God’s gift. “The difference between humans and all other living beings ... should not lead us to forget the goodness of other creatures. Those beings exist not only for human utility but also possess a value of their own; they are like gifts entrusted to humanity to be cherished and cultivated” (paragraph 28).

1. Available at: <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Moral dignity** (referring to how people use their freedom); **social dignity** (referring to the quality of a person’s living conditions); and **existential dignity** (related to questions of human identity including how people experience their worth in situations of illness, violence and addictions etc.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)