

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for October 9, 2011

“It was kind of you to share in my distress.” Words from St. Paul taken from our second reading today. St. Paul wrote these words to the disciples in Philippi, and he was showing his appreciation for their generosity and compassion for him, while he was in prison. In short, St. Paul was thanking the Philippians for acting as Christians are called to act – to respond with great care and thoughtfulness to those who are in need.

This should then serve as a reminder for all of us who are trying to live out the Christian life. The example that these unnamed Philippians provide for us, is very much appropriate for us to hear at this time. For we are in the midst of the month of October, which the United States bishops have decreed is Respect Life month. So, this month is dedicated to helping us, as Christians, to really stop and reflect on how well we do in our efforts for the needy and the vulnerable.

And my guess is, that for most of us, when we hear the phrase, “the needy”, our first thought is about those who are in need of financial and material assistance – the homeless, the hungry, the unemployed. And they are definitely in need of our help. But the list of the needy includes many others as well. It includes any and all persons whose inherent human dignity is being questioned or attacked in some way. The terminally ill, the imprisoned, and those who are challenged either physically or mentally are also on the list. As are those who are denied religious freedom, those who face discrimination, and those who are in their mother’s wombs.

All of these people, and many others, are in need of our assistance and our prayers. They need us to step up and speak up when they are not able to do it themselves. Now, this isn’t always easy. We may feel the desire to live out our Christian faith by responding to the needs of others, but we’re not sure how to do it. We don’t know where to begin.

Well, one place to begin, a very important place, is to look at our own attitudes toward the gift of life that God has given to us. Do we reverence life? I’m sure we do, to a certain extent. We rejoice at the sight of a beautiful newborn baby. We celebrate with a young couple on their wedding day, eager to see what blessings their married life together will bring them. We are amazed at the abilities of those around us who find great success and accomplish meaningful things to benefit our society. And when someone like this faces a crisis, or is in serious need, our hearts are moved for them and we want to help.

The real challenge for us, is to bring to our country and our society a reverence for all of human life. Not just the beautiful, the healthy and the talented. And all human life does of course, include the unborn. Some people think that the Catholic Church is preoccupied with the issue of abortion and the protection of life in the womb. But, they claim, the Church doesn’t care what happens to the person once they are born. This couldn’t be further from the truth. The Church has always been at the forefront in seeking out those in need and working to provide the necessary assistance to them – whether they are the poor, the homeless, immigrants, lepers, orphans, or terminally ill.

The reason that the Church seems to focus so much on abortion and the protection of the unborn is simple. Because the unborn face a very serious threat in our country and throughout the world. Their dignity, their human-ness, is under attack. And they are the most vulnerable, completely unable to defend themselves or speak up for themselves. And to disregard life at its most vulnerable is the beginning of the downgrading of all of human life. And we can see that in our society today.

So, our challenge then is to recognize the dignity of all human life, in every stage. And then, once we recognize, to step up and be the voice of those without a voice. To be the defender of those who cannot defend themselves. To be the protectors of those under attack. To be providers for those in need. The challenge, really, is simply to be Christians, following the example of Christ. For Christ looked at us, all of humanity, and saw that we were in dire need. So, He responded with the utmost generosity. He gave everything He could give, including His very life here on earth. That is the model for us to follow.

And to help us with this, our Respect Life committee here at St. Charles has set up an information table in the atrium. There you will find many pamphlets related to people in all stages of life that demand our attention. So, please, after Mass, stop by the table, peruse the information, and feel free to take the pamphlets with you. Hopefully, they will help every one of us to gain a greater respect of and reverence for God’s gift of life. Then, we’ll be able to see the needs of those around us and respond to those needs. This is what the early Christians in Philippi did, in imitation of our Lord’s model. May we at St. Charles, now do the same.