

Holy Family 2008 - B

LESSON: Every Child Is a Gift from God

We hear a lot of talk these days about "**human dignity**."

- ? Some people use that term to promote the idea that everyone should be **completely free** to do **whatever** they feel like.
- ? But even they don't live like that - if they get **kidnapped**, they want their kidnappers arrested and put in prison, just as we all do.
- ? Human dignity doesn't mean that everyone should have **unlimited freedom**.
- ? Rather, human dignity means that every single human being has an eternal, everlasting **value**, just because they **exist**.
- ? Because of this, we should organize our families, societies, and individual lives in a way that **welcomes** everyone and gives as **many as possible** a chance to live their lives to the full.
- ? And of course, that means having effective laws that **protect the weak, promote justice, and minimize ethical pollution**.

But today, in the middle of the Christmas season, as the Church turns our attention to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the Holy Family, it is a good time to remind ourselves **where** this human dignity comes from and **what** it implies.

Today's First Reading gives us the answer.

Abraham and Sarah were **picked** by God to be the ancestors of the ancient Israelites, God's Chosen People.

God's action in their life reveals **three key insights** into human dignity.

ILLUSTRATION: Part I: The Origin of Human Dignity

The **first** key insight is that **every child is a gift**.

Abraham and Sarah were childless until they were beyond the **normal age** for having children. Only **then** did God fulfill his promise to give them a son.

This shows us that no one has a **right** to a child: a child is a **gift** from God.

When **animals and plants** have offspring, God doesn't intervene directly; he merely allows the **laws of nature**, laws that he wrote, to follow their normal course. Not so with human beings.

- ? Every human being has an **everlasting soul** created in the very **image of God**.

- ? This soul is **different** than the souls of plants, insects, or other animals - it's different because it is **spiritual and personal**, capable of self-knowledge, moral activity, and friendship with God.
- ? This is obvious if we just look at the *world around us*: human activity is very **different** than the activity of other animals.
- ? For example, we find plenty of *laboratories* where **human** scientists are teaching animals to do all kinds of things, but no laboratories where *parakeets* are conducting experiments on **humans**.]
- ? Since the human soul is spiritual and personal, it is not **just** the product of natural processes.
- ? Rather, at the moment of conception, **God intervenes directly**, entrusting a new human person into the care of the mother and father.
- ? It's a **combination** of the **natural** process of procreation and a **supernatural** act of God.

It's similar to what happened at the **creation of Adam**,

- ? where the Bible tells us that God formed man from the **clay of the earth** (the natural element),
- ? but then, unlike all the other animals, God **breathed into Adam's nostrils** to give him life.
- ? God's own breath symbolizes this **supernatural element** of the human soul.

And so, in a very real way, **every child truly is a gift of God**, just as Isaac was God's gift to Abraham and Sarah.

This is also the great message of Christmas: Jesus became a **baby** himself (and later on suffered and died on the Cross) in order to show us just how much God **values** every baby that he sends to the earth.

ILLUSTRATION Part II: The Consequences of Human Dignity

The **second** key insight flows right out of the first one.

Since every single child is a **gift** of God and has a spiritual, personal, and everlasting soul, every single human being has **equal dignity**; they **deserve to be treated like people, not like things**.

- ? This is why **slavery** is wrong - it treats a certain class of people as if they were **inferior** to another class.
- ? This is why **euthanasia** or "mercy-killing" is wrong - it treats the elderly, handicapped, or sick as if their dignity depended on being able to **do something "productive"** for society, and when that production capacity fails, they are **thrown away**, like a broken piece of furniture.
- ? This is why **artificial reproduction** (like In Vitro Fertilization or cloning) is wrong - it treats human beings as if they were **products**, like things you **buy at the store**, instead of unique gifts from God with the **same dignity** as the parents.

- ? This is why **abortion** is wrong – it treats a new human life like an “invader” into a woman’s body or like a cancer that needs to be removed before it destroys a person’s life, instead of the blessing of a new child who has an immortal soul.
- ? This is why **embryonic stem-cell research** is wrong - it treats very small human beings as if they were **disposable**; it **kills** them to take their **stem cells** as **hunters** kill animals to get their **fur**.

This is also why it is no surprise that **anti-Catholic political regimes** always systematically engage in these practices.

- ? The Nazis, the Soviets, the Chinese communists - they **promoted** (or promote) these crimes because they have forgotten that **every human being comes from God and is going to God**.
- ? It is why the so-called “Freedom of Choice Act” must be defeated in our Congress – it is a bill which makes abortion an undeniable “right” for **any** reason and **forces** people to perform and pay for them, despite their moral objections.

Only **Jesus Christ** has made it clear to the world that **every human being**, no matter how small or weak, is loved infinitely by God and ought to be treated as such.

ILLUSTRATION: Part III: Every Person Has a Unique Mission

The **third** key insight about human dignity is the most **exciting** one.

Since each one of us has been created directly by God, with the cooperation of our parents, each one of us has a **unique mission** to accomplish in the world.

In the Bible God is always talking about **mission and purpose**.

- ? When Abram and Sarai received God's promise to be the ancestors of his Chosen People, God actually **changed their names** to Abraham and Sarah, as a sign of their **God-given mission**.
- ? In today's Gospel passage, we see the **same thing** happening.
- ? Simeon and Anna have **spent their lives** serving God, and now they are the only ones who **recognize** Jesus, and they start **spreading the Good News** that the Savior has come - this was their unique mission.
- ? Jesus himself, the **model** for every one of us, has the mission of redeeming the fallen human race.

Every single one of us has a God-given **mission** - it came with being **created**.

- ? And God has given different sets of talents and gifts to **equip** each of us for our mission.
- ? This mission is our unique way of **knowing and loving God** - our friendship with him is not **generic**, but **personal**, because God made us personal and unique.

- ? And if we follow Christ and fulfill this mission, then we will **add** something to heaven that **no one else** can add.
- ? Our fulfillment and eternal happiness come from our **finding and fulfilling** this unique, God-given mission.
- ? And when we are **baptized**, this mission is **plugged into** Christ's mission - we become his missionaries.
- ? As Pope Paul VI put it: "In God's plan, every man is born to seek self-fulfillment, for every human life is called to some task by God" (*Populorum progression*, #15)

APPLICATION: The Family - Protector of Human Dignity

And for every one of us, this **journey of discovery** begins in the **family**.

- ? In the **family** we gradually learn the truth about who we are, who God is, who we are called to be, and how to use our gifts and talents responsibly.
- ? This is why the Church is always **defending the family**, just as God designed it from the very beginning of history.
- ? **God** gives us our dignity as human beings, but the **family** teaches us to **live in accordance** with that dignity.

And so today, as we contemplate **the Holy Family**,

- ? let's thank the Lord for the great gift of **human life** and the **immeasurable dignity** he has bestowed upon it,
- ? let's **thank** him for the wise and beautiful design of the family, in which that life **takes shape** and grows to maturity,
- ? let's thank him for his **personal love** for each one of us and promise that we will **imitate that love** in the way we live out our family lives,
- ? and let's ask him to show us all how to **live our lives to the full** and help as **many** others as possible do the same.