

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

September 19, 2021

Wisdom 2:12, 17–20 • James 3:16–4:3 • Mark 9:30–37

I.

On Friday,

I offered the opening prayer for the third annual Virginia March for Life.

The theme for this year was “Together Strong, Life Unites.”

Here is the text of the prayer I offered a few blocks from here:

O God,
you are able to accomplish far more
than all we ask for or imagine.

Here, at the Capitol of Virginia,
we stand next to the cradle of American democracy,
and we turn to the cradle of life,
calling upon our representatives in government
to secure, for all people,
those unalienable rights declared at the birth of our country.

May we love life enough
to keep striving to protect the unborn from the tyranny of abortion,
and may we wield weapons of righteousness in our endeavor:
knowledge, patience, kindness, unfeigned love, and truthful speech.

Life unites us;
may we remain together, strong in our mission,
so that children everywhere
may advance in wisdom and grace and favor
before you and before all people. Amen.

II.

Today's Gospel is about life and death

For the second consecutive week,
Jesus predicts his passion, death, and resurrection.

But the apostles fail to understand this paschal mystery of Jesus,
and how it applies to their lives.

Oblivious to the implication of Jesus' prediction,
they argue among themselves about who is the greatest.

Once more, Christ instructs his followers—all of us—
that we are to imitate his perfect and generous act of service on the Cross:

“If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

Christian charity, and service to others,
is not just about doing good.

It is, fundamentally,
a participation in Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

Likewise,
the world's injustices and social ills are not just technical problems.

Sin—our sin—is their root cause,
as St. James says in the Second Reading:

“Where do the wars
and where do the conflicts among you come from?
Is it not from your passions
that make war within your members?”

Along those lines,
the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) taught that,

“The imbalances under which the modern world labors
are linked with that more basic imbalance
which is rooted in the heart of man”
(*Gaudium et spes*, no. 10).

Therefore, Catholic social justice,
which is an integral part of our faith,
is not just a matter of advocating for certain public policies.

Ultimately, social justice seeks to help people be renewed in their own lives,
so that they can then cooperate with God
in his plan for an equitable and just world.

Again, from the Second Vatican Council:

“Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word [Christ]
does the mystery of man take on light. ...
Christ... fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. ...
By suffering for us [Christ] not only provided us with an example for our imitation,
he blazed a trail,
and if we follow it,
life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning. ...
Through [the Holy Spirit] ... the whole man is renewed from within” (no. 22).

The Council continues:

“All this holds true not only for Christians,
but for all men of good will...
since Christ died for all men,
and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine,
we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit...
offers to every man the possibility of being associated
with [Christ’s] paschal mystery” (no. 10).

III.

Service to those in need is a regular part of Christian life—
not a specialty for a group of elites.

In that regard,
it's telling how Jesus illustrates his teaching on service
as a participation in his own suffering, death, and resurrection:

“Taking a child, he placed it in their midst,
and putting his arms around it, he said to them,
‘Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me;
and whoever receives me,
receives not me but the One who sent me.’”

To imitate Christ's death and resurrection
is to serve and protect the most vulnerable,
such as children.

An overview, then, about social justice ministry here at the Cathedral.

The parish spends \$22,000 each year
in direct financial payments to those in need (rental assistance, etc.).

The Cathedral spends an equal amount, \$22,000,
in grants to various agencies in the area that assist the poor and needy.

The parish also gives about \$24,000 to its sister parish and school
in Carissade, Haiti.

And each month,
the parish conducts a service project that is concrete, concise, and clear.

Examples include collecting clothes for the homeless ministry
at nearby St. Peter's Pro-Cathedral.

During September,
parishioners are counting their steps
to make a contribution to the Cathedral's sister parish in Haiti.

The culmination will be the Step-by-Step for Haiti walkathon next Sunday.

Social justice includes other activities.

Over the last few months, several parishioners, independently, have approached me about respect-life ministry.

This is an area of the parish's social justice ministry that can be strengthened. At the beginning of the summer, the parish collected money for the Pregnancy Resource Center of Richmond through the baby bottle campaign.

On Wednesday, the national 40 Days for Life fall vigil will get underway.

In Richmond, this prayerful and peaceful campaign to end abortion will take place outside the Planned Parenthood Clinic on N. Hamilton Street.

My hope is that some Cathedral parishioners will sign up.

More information is in the bulletin, and more information will be forthcoming.

III.

A final thought.

Each Sunday, we participate in the dying and rising of Christ in the Mass.

When the sacrifice of Christ's death and resurrection is offered, Christ becomes present in Eucharistic sacrament.

He gives himself up **for** us to the Father, and then he gives himself **to** us in the Eucharist.

It is the Bread of Life, given to us so that we can better the lives of others.

We care for the poor in the name of Christ,

We serve the poor with the power of Christ.