



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



April 2021

Highlights of this newsletter:

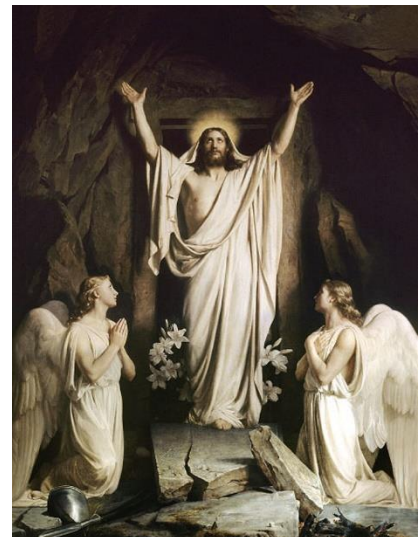
- ❖ On Human Dignity
- ❖ News in our Office
- ❖ New Threats to Human Life and Dignity

Dear Friends for Life,

Happy Easter to All!

ON HUMAN DIGNITY

During this joyous season, it is good to reflect on how God's infinite love for us is manifested in its fullness in the Crucifixion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And in this, Easter so distinctively highlights the primary source of our true human dignity: we are created in the Image of God and made for eternal communion with Him. Even when humankind had fallen, God sent His Son to redeem us—because He loves us so much, because He wants us in Heaven to share in His eternal glory! ***God is Love, and in a way unlike any other creature, we are made in His Image, to love, for Love.*** Therefore, this innate human dignity is very special and indeed, inviolable—that is, sacred, immeasurably precious, and inalienable.¹



But others see human dignity in a different light: a secular perspective in which dignity corresponds directly to observable, even measurable, traits or qualities. Very often, dignity is used as a synonym for functional independence and autonomy, placing an existential premium on the ability to care for and make decisions for oneself. This, however, is in complete contradistinction to the dignity we understand from a Christian perspective, because the secular type of dignity is one that can be degraded, one that can be lost, and one that can be assigned by others (including the State) to determine one's value, even one's worthiness to live.

In the last month, New Mexico has become the ninth state to legalize assisted suicide, with the governor calling it “dignity in dying.” Sadly, a nebulous use of the word dignity in the assisted suicide debate is all

¹ Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity is threefold: (1) based on our existence as created in God's image, (2) achieved as a consequence of our behaviors, coherent with the *Imago Dei* and made possible through His grace, in becoming who we are meant to be, and (3) being a child of God called to share in the divine life and to follow Christ's self-giving love (Beatitudes). This framework is simplified for the purpose of this discussion, in order to contrast with the common utilitarian definition of dignity used in public debates on assisted suicide.

William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 52-53, 61-63.

too common. The two sides talk about respecting “dignity” (some legislation is even entitled “Death with Dignity”). But when dignity is not clearly defined in its usage, both parties just talk past each other. If dignity is only commensurate with autonomy, physical prowess or some desired trait, then indeed, it can be diminished and even disappear. It is temporary. And, understandably, dying before losing those characteristics has a superficial appeal—no one wants to need help, relinquish self-determination, etc.

But we know our true human dignity is much more than such quantifiable characteristics; rather, it is the essence of what it means to be human—a child of God, intended for heavenly Eternity. It is permanent. Therefore, true human dignity cannot be diminished by the ravages of poor health, disease, injury, etc. However, denial of this true human dignity is what leads people to ignore the immeasurable value of every human life, and to fall prey to the idea that assisted suicide is a reasonable solution to suffering the loss of important, but not ultimate, qualities. If true human dignity is permanent and priceless, then a human life never loses meaning, never loses value in the eyes of God Who created it; there can be no justification to end it volitionally. Moreover, we know, that God loves us so much (the foundation of our dignity) that He will not fail us, even in times of apparent suffering—we solve nothing by taking the life He gives and which only He has the right to take.²

The battle to preserve this understanding of true human dignity is weakened when we allow it to be conflated with a secular view of dignity. But we also undermine it by actions that are inconsistent with a true human dignity. When we reinforce dehumanizing language (e.g. referring to severely debilitated people as “vegetables”), passively accept the exploitation of the unborn for our own benefit (e.g. use of cell lines derived from aborted fetuses to develop medications, vaccines, and other products), celebrate technology that thwarts the sublime meaning of the conjugal embrace or perverts it with pornography, excuse medical and surgical interventions that supplant the very integrity of the human body, etc. we become another brick in the “structure of sin” upon which the Culture of Death is built. When we reject (and destroy) the value of human life in all its stages (especially the most vulnerable) and impede the flourishing of its perfective purpose (i.e. commit sin or prevent one from knowing, loving and serving God), we reject its true human dignity.

However, it is possible and necessary to uphold the true dignity of human life in our everyday lives. We do it in the way we treat others, the causes we support, and the efforts that we make to defend human life and true human dignity. Some simple ways to get started:

- You can visit our website, and that of the USCCB and NYS Catholic Conference to stay informed on issues that violate human life, dignity, and the family.
- Please take advantage of the “Take Action” items available to facilitate messages to legislators so that we may influence the passing of positive, life-affirming laws; calling and writing letters are even more effective ways to express these concerns.

² Despite objections in terminology by proponents of assisted suicide, all actions to take one’s own life constitute suicide and therefore represent some degree of despair and/or mental health crisis. In this, state-sanctioned suicide, via assisted suicide legislation, is also an egregious affront to human solidarity as it discriminates against those with severe debility or disease. Rather than being offered the standard of life-affirming support and preventive interventions, these individuals are treated as if their lives are not worthy, that they are “better off dead.” Even in death, however, we should not lose hope for our brothers and sisters who have chosen suicide to end unbearable suffering: “We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to Him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.” Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 2283

- Use these resources to learn the issues and how to talk about them (even if it is just three short talking points) so that you can educate others—your evangelization is an important component in changing the culture.
- Of course, most importantly, prayer must be the foundation of everything.

As you can see, though, there is something every one of us can do!

NEWS IN OUR OFFICE

We are very pleased to announce that the special webpage for the *Roe v. Wade* movie is available for an extended period. **The *Roe v. Wade* movie can be ordered at a special 35% discount through April 30** (and is available to watch, unlimited, for 30 days after ordering). www.DRVCLife.org/movie

In addition, on Thursday May 27, 2021 at 7:00p.m. we will be hosting a **one-hour live Q&A session with the producer/director/actor, Nick Loeb**, by Zoom. We hope you will consider joining us! Check out our website for registration.

The three-part series on Women's Health and Fertility, a collaboration with the Gianna Center and Students for Life, will be available for viewing on our website very soon.

THREATS TO THE DIGNITY AND SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

- New York has legalized recreational marijuana which jeopardizes safety (impaired behaviors) as well as physical and mental health, especially for youth.³
- The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) has lifted restrictions to RU-486 access via telemedicine. This means the medical abortion pill can be sent through the mail after a telehealth visit. No physical exam or ultrasound is necessary.⁴
- The NIH (National Institutes of Health) has reinstated federal funding to support research using fetal tissue (such funding was banned in 2018).⁵

Let us continue to pray without ceasing!

Sincerely in Christ,

Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

“We are called to live our Catholic Faith heroically. Even the weakest person receives the grace from Christ to live the truth in love.”—Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke

³ [Governor Cuomo Signs Legislation Legalizing Adult-Use Cannabis \(ny.gov\)](https://www.ny.gov/governor-cuomo-signs-legislation-legalizing-adult-use-cannabis)

⁴ [FDA Temporarily Lifts Restriction on Abortion Pill | MedPage Today](https://www.medpagetoday.com/obstetrics-gynecology/abortion/486486)

⁵ [NIH reverses restrictions on fetal tissue research | CNA \(catholicnewsagency.com\)](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/ni-h-reverses-restrictions-on-fetal-tissue-research); [FDA Caught Buying 'Fresh' Aborted Baby Body Parts From Dealer \(thefederalist.com\)](https://www.thefederalist.com/fda-caught-buying-fresh-aborted-baby-body-parts-from-dealer)