

It Gets Clearer After This...

The Church's teaching on the sanctity of life is profound and foundational. It's profound because it is both expressed and implied in the life and teachings of Jesus, who never articulated exactly these teachings, yet exemplified all of them.

The very language of Jesus' Incarnation (His becoming flesh) has implications far beyond what is written down in the Gospels: in a historical and cultural setting where each of these words were highly significant, God gave His only Son, to death, for the salvation of the world.

In our time, the sacrifice of a son or daughter in military service or law enforcement, or first-responder work — or in any context — is seen as the ultimate sacrifice that parents might endure. But in Jesus' day and culture, giving a son would be thought of as a higher sacrifice, and an only son is thus the ultimate. So when God gives His only Son, He is giving the ultimate gift for the salvation of the world. Sorry, but that's how people saw things in that time.

In another example of action as language, Jesus violates the societal norm of male superiority over women in several ways: He heals the hemorrhaging woman who touches His cloak, He talks to the Samaritan woman at the well, and He reveals Himself, risen from the dead, to Mary Magdalene before anyone else. Each of these violated the religious norms of His time and place, and each of them teach us that the Son of God does not see women as less than men in any way.

The same is true of His treatment of those identified as sinners in His time: anyone with a birth defect or deformity, or leprosy was seen as a living example of God's punishment for sin — either on the part of the one suffering, or on the part of that person's ancestors. To make His point, in nearly every healing (maybe all of them), in addition to healing the physical malady before Him, He says, "your sins are forgiven," or "your faith has saved you."

Finally, Jesus was famously in the company of those considered sinners: tax collectors (these would be Jews collaborating with the occupying Romans and working on "commission"), and others thought to be hopeless sinners. He allowed a woman to wash and anoint His feet — another taboo, as she was identified as a prostitute and in any case should not have been touching Him at all...

The message in all these examples and more is this: there is no one whom Jesus considers lesser than others, or than Himself, even to the point at which He washes the feet of His disciples. So while not every point in Catholic Social Teaching is found in the Gospels, everything in the Gospel demands that the followers of Jesus be unwavering in their care, concern, and love for every person as a unique creation of God.

Next time:

The Call to Family, Community, and Participation, and Rights and Responsibilities.