October 21, 2018
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Every Life, Every-Un: Cherished, Chosen, Sent”
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Reading 1 Isaiah 53:10-11
The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity.
If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.
Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

Reading 2 Hebrews 4:14-16
Brothers and sisters: Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Gospel Mark 10:35-45
James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” He replied, “What do you wish me to do for you?” They answered him, “Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They said to him, “We can.” Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared.” When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

HOMILY
His wife had gone into labor, and Jack was sitting in the waiting room of a hospital with several other dads-to-be. The nurse walked out and said to Mr. Jones, one of the other men, “Congratulations sir, you’re the new father of twins!” Mr. Jones replied, “How about that, I work for the Doublemint Chewing Gum Company.” He then followed the nurse to his wife’s room.

About an hour later, the same nurse entered the waiting room and announced that Mr. Smith’s wife had just had triplets. Mr. Smith, sitting next to Jack, stood up and said, “Well, isn’t that amazing, I work for the 3M Company.” Another hour later, the nurse came into the room and said that Mr. White’s wife had just had quadruplets. Mr. White, sitting across from Jack, jumped up and said, “Unbelievable, I work for Four Seasons Resorts!” At that point, Jack got up and started to leave. When the others who were there asked him why he was leaving, he remarked, “I think I need a breath of fresh air. I work for 7-Up.”
You may be wondering how that relates to this homily. For now, keep in mind the other name that was successfully marketed by 7-Up to distinguish it from Pepsi and Coke – it was called … the Uncola. The Un … cola.

Respect Life Month is celebrated by the Church each October, and this month begins another year-long focus on a particular theme to help us understand, treasure and be more involved with cultivating a true respect for all human life, from conception to natural death. Now, we’ve probably heard that phrase dozens, if not hundreds of times – respect for all human life, from conception to natural death. We should not, and we certainly can not, diminish the significance of those very important and very fragile life stages, at the beginning and at the end – stages when our culture, our society, spurs us on with a quest for shallow perfection, a quest for false mercy, and even a quest for misguided convenience – spurs us on to seriously consider, and even take, the supposed easier solution to a life-based issue. Our Christian faith affirms, and science increasingly reaffirms, that human life does begin at the moment of conception – the moment of conception, several days before the developing cells even attach to the womb, a very few weeks before a heartbeat can be detected by today’s technology, approximately 5 months before being viable outside of the womb, and generally 9 months before that developing baby sees the light of day. From the moment of conception, the blueprint is laid out for that human being’s hair color, eye color, gender, height and other physical characteristics. And, at the other end of life’s spectrum, our Christian faith affirms that human life has fundamental value and is precious until that last breath, that last breath before a natural death.

But, as important as those beginning and ending stages of life are, we are called to believe that all human life is important at all stages. Those words and that belief are reinforced by this year’s Respect Life theme: “Every Life: Cherished, Chosen, Sent.” Every Life – we cannot lose sight that we are all children of God, created in God’s image and likeness, we are all part of God’s family, we all need to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ – said in these or similar words, Bishop Matano voiced it at the Men’s Conference last Saturday when he also said he prayed daily for family and church unity, Father Bob and Father Juan noted it in some recent homilies, and Father Bob Kennedy stressed it at a staff retreat the other day when discussing how we might treat each other under various circumstances – how hospitable are we to others who are not like us or we don’t agree with. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells His disciples, and He tells us, “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.” Jesus calls us, He sends us, to follow Him in service to all, caring for all in their needs, to cherish every life.

Let’s return now to our friend, Jack, and the Un-cola. 7-Up had a remarkable marketing strategy by calling it the Un-cola, obviously trying to put a positive spin on it. Because, when we usually think of something being un-, it often tends to bring along a less positive image, doesn’t it – think of someone being un-American, or un-Christian, or even un-sportsmanlike, or you being un-invited to an event that you really would like to attend. … An interesting aside: after giving the homily at the 7:30 Mass, I glanced at today’s local newspaper and there on the front page of the business section is a positive story about Pinterest, the un-social network. … Catholic Charities of New York holds a huge, fund-raising dinner each year to honor Al Smith, who was Governor of New York for about 8 years during the early part of the 20th century. He was Catholic, and ran for President in 1928, but was … un-elected. Did I mention huge dinner? Six years ago, the dinner guests included then-President Obama as well as opposing Presidential candidate Romney. Timothy Cardinal Dolan, host of the 2012 Al Smith dinner, noted how Al Smith, a man with deep Catholic faith and ringing patriotism, would have “a tear in his
Irish eyes for what we would call the uns ... the uns of the world ... the un-employed, the un-insured, the un-wanted, the un-wed mother, the innocent, fragile un-born baby in her womb, the un-documented, the un-housed, the un-healthy, the un-fed, the under-educated. Government, Al Smith believed, should be on the side of these –uns. But a government partnering, partnering with family, church, parish, neighborhood organizations and community, never intruding or opposing, since when all is said and done, it’s ‘In God We Trust,’ not ultimately in government or politics.” … As Catholic Christians, we are called by Catholic Social Justice and Respect Life teachings, based on the teachings of Christ, to be on the side of these –uns. As Catholic Christians, we are sent by Jesus to cherish them, to respect them, to help them. Consider that, at some points in our own lives, each and every one of us is an –un. And, we might even add a few more who we are called to evangelize, to spread the “Good News” of Jesus, and to generally help: the un-spiritual, the un-baptized, the under-served, those who feel un-loved and un-appreciated, and finally, the un-perfect. Because, after all, not one of us is perfect – every un- of us needs God’s grace and mercy. Every un- of us needs to be loved as a child of God, loved as a brother or sister in Christ.

Every Life: Cherished, Chosen, Sent.

We head to the polls in a little over 2 weeks. If we set aside the personalities of the political characters, it should not come as news that social justice and respect life issues profoundly contribute to the deep divide that separates the political parties, and this country as a whole. But, unfortunately, these same issues also contribute in some ways to visible divisions in our one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Catholics and the Catholic Church do so much good in the world, especially in the social-services arena. Just in our nation, Catholic groups are among the biggest providers of social-service charity, when you consider Catholic Charities, soup kitchens, food pantries, and organizations like our very own Saints Place. To name just a few others in the parish: St. Louis has a monthly collection of food for area food cupboards, we actively support Fr. Rick Frechette in our Haiti Initiative, one of the tenets of the Knights of Columbus is to help others in need, and, of course, a portion of the Catholic Ministries Appeal is given to help those in need. But, with all of the good that we do as Catholics, in our nation and in the world, we are not united in our stance towards social justice and, especially, respect life issues, and those divisions often go beyond healthy debate. We may be challenged to agree with one or more of the Church’s positions, but we should at least leave politics aside, pray, and try to understand the reasons behind the Church’s teaching.

Al Smith lost the presidency in 1928, and one of the major reasons was his deep Catholic faith – many were prejudiced against Catholics at the time. Times have changed, and Catholics are in the mainstream of everything, even politics. How would our nation, indeed, how would our world look if a uniformly united, universal, un-divided, consensus of Catholics, independent of party stance, truly promoted a Respect for Life, every life. How would our nation look if every un- of us pushed our politicians to be un-political and do the same. Every Life: Cherished, Chosen, Sent.