

This weekend our church celebrates Respect Life Sunday. The Catholic Church supports respect for life from womb to tomb. Almost everyone knows of our opposition to abortion, but fewer know about our opposition to the death penalty, or even our support for workers' rights, good health care, international economic justice, and peaceful solutions to conflicts at home and abroad. I have long been a supporter of Amnesty International, which was founded to support prisoners of conscience held unjustly throughout the world. Over the years, Amnesty's influence grew and its areas of interest expanded. This year I sadly ended my relationship with the organization when it came out in favor of global abortion rights. The organization veered into an area beyond its expertise and caused many Catholics to make a choice we did not want to make. I continue to support other organizations that feed the hungry, provide jobs for the unemployed, and advocate for the poor.

God has given us the gift of faith, and we need to nourish it. One way we nourish it is by using it. We use it when we pray, but also when we take some action on behalf of others.

This is behind the parable and the teaching of Jesus in today's gospel. He says when workers come in from the field, the employer does not welcome them to sit at the table like a member of the family. Workers who do their job are good, but something more is required to be considered a close friend or relative. With the gift of faith, we are workers in God's field. But if we only do the minimum with regard to our faith, we are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do. Instead, we look for other ways to engage our faith. We contribute to the support of the church; we volunteer here and at other organizations in the community; we write letters to journals and politicians to express our views on behalf of life; we learn about our faith and teach it to others; we take care of the sick and the aged, the infant and the student. We do all these things because we care for others, because our faith in God tells us that all human life deserves to be respected.

Sometimes we get discouraged. We may be tempted to think we cannot make a difference in the world, but we can. That is the point of Jesus' first saying in this gospel. If you had faith the size of a mustard seed you could command mulberry trees to move, and they would obey. Catholics have accomplished great things in this country on behalf of workers, the poor, the sick, and the aged. The effort we put into living our faith continues to have an effect in our society. We do not slacken. We keep our voice strong on behalf of the defenseless, and we ask God to help us help them. Every human life is precious in God's eyes. God makes every human being with an intention. When we support human life, when we do more than we are obliged to do, we respect what God has made, and we make the world a better place.