

# REVERENCE AND LOVE FOR EVERY HUMAN LIFE

FROM THE GOSPEL OF LIFE (EVANGELIUM VITAE), 39–41

MAN'S LIFE COMES FROM GOD; IT IS HIS GIFT, HIS IMAGE AND imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills. God himself makes this clear to Noah after the Flood: "For your own lifeblood, too, I will demand an accounting... and from man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life" (Gen 9:5). The biblical text is concerned to emphasize how the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity: "For God made man in his own image" (Gen 9:6).

Human life and death are thus in the hands of God, in his power: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind," exclaims Job (12:10). "The Lord brings to death and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6). He alone can say: "It is I who bring both death and life" (Dt 32:39).

But God does not exercise this power in an arbitrary and threatening way, but rather as part of his care and loving concern for his creatures. If it is true that human life is in the hands of God, it is no less true that these are loving hands, like those of a mother who accepts, nurtures and takes care of her child: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul" (Ps 131:2; cf. Is 49:15; 66:12-13; Hos 11:4)...

The question: "What have you done?" (Gen 4:10), which God addresses to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel, interprets the experience of every person: in the depths of his conscience, man is always reminded of the inviolability of life—his own life and that of others—as something which does not belong to him, because it is the property and gift of God the Creator and Father.

The commandment regarding the inviolability of human life reverberates at the heart of the "ten words" in the covenant of Sinai (cf. Ex 34:28). In the first place that commandment prohibits murder: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13); "do not slay the innocent and righteous" (Ex 23:7). But, as is brought out in Israel's later legislation, it also prohibits all personal injury inflicted on another (cf. Ex 21:12-27)...

[The] overall message, which the New Testament will bring to perfection, is a forceful appeal for respect for the inviolability of physical life and the integrity of the person.

...By his words and actions Jesus further unveils the positive requirements of the commandment regarding the inviolability of life. These requirements were already present in the Old Testament, where legislation dealt with protecting and defending life when it was weak and threatened: in the case of foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick and the poor in general, including children in the womb (cf. Ex 21:22; 22:20-26). With Jesus these positive requirements assume new force and urgency, and are revealed in all their breadth and depth...

A stranger is no longer a stranger for the person who must become a neighbor to someone in need, to the point of accepting responsibility for his life, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows so clearly (cf. Lk 10:25-37). Even an enemy ceases to be an enemy for the person who is obliged to love him (cf. Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-35), to "do good" to him (cf. Lk 6:27, 33, 35) and to respond to his immediate needs promptly and with no expectation of repayment (cf. Lk 6:34-35). The height of this love is to pray for one's enemy. By so doing we achieve harmony with the providential love of God: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:44-45; cf. Lk 6:28, 35).

Thus the deepest element of God's commandment to protect human life is the requirement to show reverence and love for every person and the life of every person. This is the teaching which the Apostle Paul, echoing the words of Jesus, addresses to the Christians in Rome: "The commandments 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:9-10). ■



Pope St. John Paul II on his Encyclical *The Gospel of Life* (1995): "...[it] is meant to be a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same time, a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!"