

Thursday, January 26, 2017
Prayer Service for Life

Have you ever heard about a children's book entitled: ***If Everybody Did?*** It was published in 1990. The author is Jo Ann Stover who also did all of the illustrations.

It's written for children preschool age through 2nd graders. I became familiar with the book through my young nieces and nephews years ago.

The book describes the humorous and the negative consequences of everyone doing his/her own thing. For example:

- One person might spill their milk, but what would happen if everybody did?
- What if one person tracked mud on the floor, and what would happen if everybody did?
- How about if someone drops a piece of litter in the park? It's not hard to picture "if everybody did." Things can go from bad to worse pretty quickly.

But then the book takes an interesting turn. It says:

- if one person cleans up their spills,
- if one person wipes their feet,
- if one person throws their trash in the trashcan, etc., suddenly everybody does!

As a result, goodness and happiness blossom; peace and good order become real. The book is essentially a lesson in personal responsibility; how individual decisions and actions affect others.

So what if the simple message written and illustrated in Jo Ann Stover's book were to be applied to all the issues concerning the sacredness of all human life from conception to natural death?

The theme of this year's March for Life in Washington is: ***The Power of One***. It is inspired by the prophetic words of J.R.R. Tolkien: "Even the smallest person can change the course of history." It's from his famous work, ***The Lord of the Rings***.

The Power of One, means that one person can make a difference in the world, whether in the life of one person or in the lives of many.

Sadly, in the U.S. alone, a million unborn babies are not even given the opportunity to live and change the world each year.

Many people are discouraged by government that doesn't seem to care about the sanctity of human life.

But that discouragement should not limit our focus and our action. Building a culture of life and ending abortion takes each and every person.

I recently read a Pro-Life reflection on this theme of ***The Power of One***. The author of the reflection is Allison LeDoux who is married and has 8 children. She is also the director of the Office for Pro-Life, Marriage, and Family in the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts.

In her reflection, Allison reflects on how the idea of ***The Power of One*** might impact our understanding and appreciation for God's gift of human life.

Like the children's book ***If Everybody Did***, Allison asks us to think about:

- What if one person reaches out to a frightened pregnant teenager with the support and encouragement to choose life?
- What if one person offers financial assistance to a mother struggling with rent, food, and the cost of diapers?
- What if one man who shows up every week to pray the rosary on the sidewalk gives a pregnant woman the courage not to go through with an abortion?
- What if a pamphlet distributed after Mass on Sunday helps a man or woman who participated in an abortion to have the courage to go to confession and find healing?
- What if one doctor caring for a family who's received an adverse prenatal diagnosis, encourages them not to give in to the pressure to "terminate" the pregnancy and provides every possible avenue of authentic healthcare?
- What if one person drives their homebound neighbor to Mass each week?
- What if one class of seventh graders spends time with the elderly at a local nursing home?
- What if one more person posts a video on YouTube or speaks out against genocide in Africa or the Middle East?

- What if one more letter or phone call from a citizen convinces a state or federal representative to vote in favor of life?

I will be on the bus tomorrow and I will be walking with students from St. Joseph's Catholic Academy in the March for Life in Washington.

I know that they are young enough to remember the children's book by Jo Ann Stover, and I know that they are old enough now to understand the more serious questions asked by Allison LeDoux.

I also know that they have enough faith to understand what Sirach has said to us this evening in the Scripture reading:

- That God has done wondrous things on earth
- That God is the one who fosters every person's growth from their mother's womb
- That God fashions every single person, born and unborn, according to his will.

The students I will be marching with and praying with and having lots of discussion on the bus know that every single human person is made in the image and likeness of God.

They know that this is the truth about human dignity, even though they are in those awkward years of being a teenager when they often question their self-worth or their self-image.

They know this truth about the sanctity of human life, even though they are constantly bombarded by other values and opinions that undermine that truth, because they are the generation of instant, social media.

But thanks be to God, as we are reminded by Sirach,

- The Lord God blesses us.
- The Lord God grants us joy of heart.
- The Lord God allows his peace to abide among us in our relationships with others.
- And the Lord God puts his peace in our hearts so that each of us can abide with ourselves.

I can't wait to ask the young people to share their thoughts about ***The Power of One***. I can't wait to ask them how they would finish the question, "What if everyone did...?"

I can't wait to ask them:

- What if every one of them read the story to a younger brother or sister, or niece or nephew?
- And what if those children began to understand about their own dignity and the God-given dignity of every human person?
- What if they learned and understood and acted on the truth that all human life is sacred?
- What if they learned and shared from one person to another the story of life that comes from God; a story of life that is full of hope and imagination that goes well beyond the hope and imagination that J.R.R. Tolkien shared in his writings?

Starting with an individual's family, close circle of friends, or neighborhood, our efforts can and will change hearts and minds, save lives, and build a culture of life.

The Catholic Church has been on the front lines of the pro-life movement for decades. We take seriously the fundamental call to be People of Life. Consider how even one heart moved by mercy, can inspire an outpouring of love.

Some people have asked why Pope Francis has not been more explicit in condemning abortion as his predecessors did, especially the great champion of the Pro-Life Movement, St. John Paul II.

Actually, our Holy Father Pope Francis has made explicit statements, including the following:

"Each child who is unborn, but is unjustly condemned to be aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who, even before he was born, and then as soon as he was born, experienced the rejection of the world."

Pope Francis, who affirms the Church's teaching on the sanctity of life from conception to natural death has also said, "Each elderly person, even if infirm or at the end of his or her days, bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded."

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the Archbishop of Boston, who has known Pope Francis for more than 25 years has said that the Holy Father also gives us the context for the Church's teaching on abortion.

That context is found in the love and mercy that we have all received from the Lord God, and that each one of us is commanded to share with others, including those who are pro-choice or even pro-abortion.

In his speech at the Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus in 2013, Cardinal O'Malley observed that love and mercy are keys that will open hearts that have been hardened by the self-centered and selfish individualism of our age.

The witness each person gives during tomorrow's March for Life in Washington, will show that ***The Power of One*** is the only form of individualism that we accept.

It is the power of God's grace working in and through each one of us to do one thing to build up a culture of life in our country and in our world.

So what if the Bishop of the diocese rides on the bus and walks with a group of young people in Washington? What difference will it make?

I learned the answer many years ago when I read to one of my nieces or nephews or one of them read to me a story that goes like this:

- One person might spill their milk, but what would happen if everybody did?
- One person tracked mud on the floor, and what would happen if everybody did?
- One person drops a piece of litter in the park, but what would happen if everybody did? Things can go from bad to worse pretty quickly.

But

- if one person cleans up their spills,
- if one person wipes their feet,

- if one person throws their empty container in the recycling bin, then suddenly everybody does!

It only takes one person, inspired by God to love, protect, and defend life.
It only takes one person to believe with all their heart that every life matters.
It only takes one person to stand up and proclaim that every life is worth living.

And when one person and one person and one person come together in that effort, it becomes ***The Power of One***.

It's the way in which our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed the Gospel, saved all people from the power of sin and death, and started the Church.

His Gospel, his death and resurrection, his gift of the Church; it's all about being Pro-Life.

It's all about the power of One God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is in us and with us as we seek to do his will.

It is God's will, the Lord God who is the author of all human life, that we should one day become completely one with him forever.

So what if each one of us....

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