

The Great Gift of Life

By Archbishop John C. Wester

As we begin a new year, I am reminded of the great gift of life that God has given us, and the gift of our stewardship of all life. Everything we do with this great gift of life is marked by time that either seems to go too slowly, or too quickly. There never seems to be enough time! I am also reminded that people of faith look at time differently from how others might look at time. Greeks had two words for time. *Kronos* time is the sequential, chronological march of time, marked by seconds, hours, days weeks and years. *Kairos* time, or “God’s time” is the unfolding of our journey of faith, of God’s revelation to us, of “re-membering”, putting back together what is broken apart. God’s time is not sequential. Sometimes God breaks into our lives with moments of revelation. Sometimes we wait for God for what seems like an eternity. Whatever it seems to us, God’s grace is present no matter what, working in all of us, wherever we are in our journey of faith, always inviting us to deeper relationship.

It is this *Kairos* time that comes to mind when I look at what is before us in January. January marks many events: The Vatican’s World Day of Peace, National Migration Week, Epiphany, the commemoration of the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the opening of the 2017 New Mexico legislative session, the anniversary of Roe V. Wade and the Sanctity of Life Awareness and Unity Day Mass/March/Rally, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Catholic Schools week. Many of these events focus on the gift of life, and our call to protect life in all its stages. I am reminded of the Scripture passage from Deuteronomy: *“I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live”* (Deut 30:19).

Catholics consistently choose life at all stages. We choose life by protecting children in the womb from abortion. We choose life and walk with women and men who choose to heal from their involvement with abortion through *Project Rachel* post-abortion healing ministry. We choose life when we support families and the social and educational networks that help to raise healthy children. We choose life when we support immigrant families, unaccompanied minors and refugees who come fleeing violence in their home countries. We choose life when we support people living in poverty, people who are hungry, people who are in prison, people who are victims of human trafficking. We choose life when we support the elders of our families and communities, and commit to walking with them at the end of their lives with dignity. The Church is here to journey with all Her children, wherever they are. We choose life!

We also choose life when we advocate for just laws. The Church consistently advocates for laws that protect the unborn, children, immigrants, those who are disabled, elderly, poor or vulnerable. Last June, the New Mexico Supreme Court upheld New Mexico’s ban on doctor-assisted suicide. However, there is discussion by some State Representatives to introduce a doctor-assisted suicide bill in the 2017 legislative session.

At our Fall meeting in Baltimore, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Chair of the Pro-Life Committee, challenged us all to renew our fight against doctor-assisted suicide. He stated, “Every suicide is tragic, whether someone is young or old, healthy or sick. But the legalization of doctor-assisted suicide creates two classes of people: those whose suicides are to be prevented at any cost, and those whose suicides are deemed a positive good. We remove weapons and drugs that can cause harm to one group, while handing deadly drugs to the other, setting up yet another kind of life-threatening discrimination. This is completely unjust. Our inherent human dignity does not wane with the onset of illness or incapacity, and so all are worthy of protection. The act of prescribing a fatal, poisonous dose, moreover, undermines the very heart of medicine. Doctors vow to do no harm, and yet assisted suicide is the ultimate abandonment of their patients.” It is important to note that the New Mexico Medical Society, the Greater Albuquerque

Medical Association, the American Medical Association, the National Council on Disability, the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops and many more groups oppose doctor-assisted suicide.

To make matters more confusing, those that support doctor-assisted suicide use names like “death with dignity,” “aid in dying,” or “compassion in choices,” because they mistakenly believe that allowing someone to end their life on their own is a dignified action. However, there is no dignity or compassion in assisted suicide. Cardinal Dolan goes on to say, “What seriously ill – and often depressed -- patients need is authentic support, including doctors fully committed to their welfare and pain management as they enter their final days. Patients need our assurance that they are not a burden -- that it is a privilege to care for them as we ourselves hope to be cared for one day. A compassionate society devotes more attention, not less, to members facing the most vulnerable times in their lives.” As *Kronos* time numbers our days, it is good to remember that *Kairos* time promises us that God is always at work in our lives, even in our vulnerable and dying moments, perhaps most especially then.

Catholics must join medical professionals, disability rights groups, and other concerned citizens in fighting for the authentic care of those facing terminal illness. I encourage you to participate as a faithful citizen in the discussions around doctor assisted suicide and learn more about this important issue. To read more about the USCCB statement *To Live Each Day With Dignity: A Statement on Physician Assisted Suicide* go to the USCCB web site, www.usccb.org. Several inspiring and short real life videos are also on our Archdiocese of Santa Fe web site for your viewing.