

My Dear People of God,

The Catholic Church proclaims that **every human life is sacred** and that the **dignity** of the **human person** is and should be the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of **all** the principles of the Church's social teaching. In our society today, **human life** and the human person is under direct attack from various fronts, most notably, from abortion and euthanasia. There are also other subtle attacks on the dignity of the human person, for example the lack of care and attention for the elderly and the sick because their ability to 'give' is limited or is no longer existent. The other subtle front is economic class distinctions where the dignity of the human person is trampled upon merely because one is poor. In our second reading today, St James invites us to reflect on this last aspect.

Our society is riddled with class distinctions. Our society today tends to treat and value people according to their ability to give, or their economic status or according to the amount of money they have. Thus if one is wealthy, then they are '*somebody*' and if they are poor, then they are '*no body*'! If we are honest with ourselves, this reading from the Apostle James should make many of us uncomfortable.... and that is good. It is not so much the fact that there are distinctions, but what results from these distinctions that is of concern. Class distinctions lead to partiality; to the favoring of the rich and the slighting of the poor. It is used to keep people in their place; giving the poor people an inferiority complex and the well to do, a false sense of importance. Recognizing the dignity inherent in every human person, St James admonishes us: "*My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*".

A story is told of a wealthy man who invited his entire neighborhood to a banquet. One of his poor neighbors showed up at the banquet in tattered suit, (*which was the only one he had*) and he was turned away at the door! Undaunted by this experience, he went and borrowed an expensive suit and returned to the banquet looking like a '*man of substance*'. This time the doorman welcomed him respectfully and showed him a seat at the top table. During the meal, as he reached out for a piece of roast beef, his sleeve accidentally slipped into the dish. "*Pull up your sleeve*" the man next to him whispered. "*No, I wont*" he replied. Then addressing his sleeve he said; "*Eat, my sleeve, eat and take your fill. You have more right to the feast than I, since they respect you more than I in this house*".

My dear brothers and sisters, greatness cannot be defined by class, nor can goodness or evil. We are not defined by what we wear, drive or where we live. No class has a monopoly on good or evil, suffering or joy. Each of us human beings is great and our greatness come from God who created each one of us in His own image. Inherent in each one of us therefore is that dignity that comes from God. Let us not allow that dignity to be obscured by the peripheral things of this world. The situations and circumstances of life tend to undermine that dignity. It is for that reason, that God appears to shows partiality towards the poor and the oppressed. God's concern for them does not mean that God loves them simply because they are poor as if poverty is a virtue. Rather, God takes the side of the poor and the oppressed because they are unjustly treated by others or by circumstances.

The class differences are merely human creations. They are not of God. There are times, when these differences collapse at their own weight. For example in times of collective danger, or collective sadness, or collective joy, these distinctions are swept aside and dignity inherent in every human person is manifested. On such occasions people reach out to one another, and a great mutual enrichment occurs. Such occasions make us realize how much is lost through these artificial divisions. A clear case that comes to my mind is the sad tragedy of September 11. In the midst of that disaster, class differences did not matter!

Let us pray for the grace to acknowledge and respect that dignity inherent in every human person and especially in the poor, the needy and the vulnerable.

Thanks and God bless

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