

# SAMPLE HOMILY FOR RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY - OCT. 7, 2007

*Adapted with permission from a homily prepared by Fr. Richard Benson, C.M.  
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Hb 1: 2-3 and 2: 2-4  
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9  
2Tm 1: 6-8, 13-14  
Lk 17: 5-10

## **Respect Life Sunday**

Today the Church calls herself to a deep reflection on the sanctity of life. The readings remind us of the powerful message of John Paul II in his encyclical, **The Gospel of Life**, that human life is to be protected from the moment of conception until natural death. In the first reading from Habakkuk, we hear the prophet crying out to God for justice against the violence done to his people. The challenge of the prophet is just as relevant and necessary in the 21st century throughout the world where a culture of death is readily evident in acts of terrorism and torture. Surely the starvation in Darfur is another example of the denial of the value of human life.

Unfortunately, acts of violence against the innocent and vulnerable continue in our own country and even in our own state. A specific area that does not respect human life is the endorsement of stem cell research that seeks to fund the cloning of human embryos in order to harvest their stem cells. The moral principles involved in the Church's position may be confusing to people who do not make the distinction between the use of embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells.

Consider the real moral principles that must be applied to this issue. The support for the use of embryonic stem cells is quite popular because the results of working with adult stem cells has been downplayed. Why is this a moral issue for the Church? Human life begins at conception.

The embryo, even when first consisting of only a few cells, is a human being. On this fact, both the Church and science agree. Science tells us that the embryo

has its full complement of human genetic components, all 46 human chromosomes. It has all the potential it needs to complete its pilgrimage to birth and adulthood if given the proper environment of a human womb. This is not a "group of cells" or a "pre-human." This person is filled with the life of God and deserves total respect and reverence.

In order to retrieve stem cells from the early embryo, it is necessary to kill the embryo and remove the cells. Scientists want these cells for experimentation because they believe that they may be useful in curing certain diseases. Here is a very important fact in developing our moral and teachings. Not one person has been cured up to this point by an embryonic stem cell implant. However, many have received beneficial treatments from adult stem cells. Please remember this important moral distinction. The Church is not against "stem cell" research. It is clearly against "embryonic stem cell" research. The Church encourages the scientific community to direct its research to other sources of stem cells that are available and can be retrieved readily and morally.

When you are asked to support stem cell research that includes embryonic stem cell research, please apply these moral principles to any decisions that you may make as a citizen:

- 1. It is an abortion.**

Some people try to justify abortion by claiming that the result of conception, at least up to a certain number of days, cannot yet be considered a personal human life. But in fact, "from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human, if it were not human already. This has always been clear, ... and modern genetic science offers clear confirmation."  
*Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Procured Abortion, November 18, 1974.*

## 2. **The end does not justify the means.**

While it is clear that the motives of many of those who support embryonic stem cell research are laudable, i.e. curing human maladies, it is also clear that "one may never do evil that good may come about." There is no motive that can justify the deliberate sacrifice of another human being. Every human being is a creature of God and not simply a means to an end. When we have available methods that are moral, why should we be asked to support methods that are against the reverence to be given to all human life?

St. Luke reminds us in the Gospel today that faith is God's gracious gift and is essential to our discipleship. As people of faith, we must use the grace and strength offered in this Eucharist to join the prophet Habakkuk in defending the poor and innocent against all forms of violence. To support embryonic stem cell research is against life and also unnecessary since other options are available. As citizens, we can never leave aside our moral principles when we vote. As disciples of Jesus and faithful members of the Catholic Church, we must choose life, support life, and do everything possible to protect life – life that is created by God.