

MARCH FOR LIFE

As we mark the 45th anniversary of legalized abortion in Canada, we realize with pain that our secular society has driven a wedge between human dignity and life. Individualism, the right to be autonomous and independent, the right to decide our own future autonomously, has framed the debate about human dignity and, even, life itself for the past forty five years. It was not thus from the beginning. The very first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, does not speak of human dignity or even life itself as “right” but as “gift”. Life is a free gift from God: “*God ... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being*” (Gn. 2:7). Dignity is a gift, given to us gratuitously: “*Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness*” (Gn 1: 26).

Our Trinitarian God revealed in Jesus Christ invites us to reconsider the meaning of human freedom and dignity which lies at the heart of the secular debate about abortion and euthanasia. In Jesus, we come to know God as a Relational God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is revealed at the baptism of Jesus in the opening chapter of Mark’s Gospel. Mark reports, “*he saw the sky rent in two*” (Mk 1:10). One could gaze into the very heart of God! And what do we witness? The total self-giving love of the Father: “*You are my beloved Son. On you my favour rests*” (Mk 1: 11) We also witness the total self-giving response of Jesus, the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Our Trinitarian God is Loving Relationship, a “free communion of persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – without domination and without subordination.” The freedom of God is not found in autonomy, but in the mystery of relationship-without-subordination. “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them* (Gn. 1:27).” We were not created in the image of a solitary, paternalistic, isolated and autonomous God! We were created in the image of a Trinitarian, personal and relational God. We image God primarily insofar as we live in relationship. Perfect autonomy is not freedom, it is only isolation. In Genesis chapter three, after Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit they are naked. They attempted to seize freedom by identifying “image of God” with autonomy. They discover only their nakedness, their exposure, their isolation within creation (cf. Gen. 3:10). God is perfect freedom because God is the perfection of relationship! We image God’s freedom when we embrace relationship.

The relationship between a woman and the child of her womb is one of the closest and most intimate relationship possible for our humanity. Every beat of the mother's heart gives life to her child. If human freedom is to mirror the freedom of God, there can be no "competition" between the dignity of the mother and the life of the child! The choice to terminate a pregnancy without regard to the welfare of the unborn child is an act of domination and subordination which leads not to life-giving freedom but to isolation and lifeless autonomy. Should the woman be coerced, as she often is, by personal, economic or social pressures, she is made all the more a victim of isolation, losing both her freedom and her autonomy.

A "communion of persons without domination and without subordination" does not permit that we champion the right to life of the unborn child without regard to the consequences for the mother. There can be no "competition" between the dignity of the mother and the life of the child. This challenges our society to create a culture of life which sustains and supports this delicate and fundamental relationship. A culture of life must be permeated by compassion. Our society must provide the physical, material, psychological and spiritual supports which will sustain and accompany the woman as she embraces the life of her child as the most precious expression of her freedom and personhood. When we regard a pregnant woman and the child of her womb as image of God, we are challenged to look at the abortion debate through a new and life-giving lens.

As secularized men and women, we do everything in our power to overcome and escape the contingency of human life: we amass money and power to dominate it; we use cosmetics and face-lifts to camouflage it; we use alcohol, drugs and even pornography as an anesthetic against it. When all else fails, we claim the right to euthanize it! Euthanasia is the ultimate expression of human autonomy and isolation. God has revealed another way! Born in a stable and dying on a cross Jesus embraced our vulnerability. Without vulnerability, there is no relationship! Without relationship there is no freedom. Living Trinitarian love, we are challenged to embrace the contingency of human life by forging bonds of unity with our God, with human beings and, indeed, with all of creation. A month ago, we celebrated the canonization of Pope John Paul II. We witnessed Pope John Paul II's confident choice of vulnerability in the spring of 2005 when

we followed day by day his process of dying. In his process of dying, the Pope humbly thanked those who came to share the moment of his death.

Our Trinitarian faith helps us to realize that from the first moment of conception to the last moment of our natural lives, we are enfolded in the embrace of loving relationships. Within this web of relationships we secure our lives; within this web of relationships we realize our dignity; within this web of relationships we realize our human potential and our freedom.