Racism is a Life Issue

Last week hundreds of thousands of Catholics and other pro-life supporters gathered in Washington, D.C. and other venues to again focus attention on the victims of abortions. Much will be said and written about the intrinsic evil that is abortion, and no national holiday or statue in our nation’s capital honors the deaths of these innocents. Pro-life marchers took time off work, spent their own money to travel, and made arrangements that included hours in cars, buses and planes to reinforce their message. In the 45 years since Roe v. Wade, the enthusiastic commitment to be heard has not faded. But abortion is not the only life issue. Among others are euthanasia, assisted suicide, and capital punishment. And too many good, pro-life Catholics remain blissfully unaware of the connection between racism and the repudiation of God-given life.

Of all the moral issues that beg political campaign slogans, racism seems to make people squirm the most. Abortion has its “reproductive rights” supporters, capital punishment its “law and order” proponents, and suicide has “death with dignity” apologists. But too little in the pro-life movement seem ready to take their arguments into the racism conversation. And too many in the “pro-choice” movement do not shudder when their actions and beliefs are traced to the stainedly racist euqenics pedigree of Planned Parenthood and its founder, Margaret Sanger. All of the Church’s pro-life teachings are rooted in justice. But, as St. Augustine observed, we live in a world that is not always governed by justice, but by a “lust to dominate.” Whether it’s taking fatal sides against a developing baby, determining that a person or class of people, e.g., the elderly or disabled, is unworthy of life, or by deciding that a race or ethnic group is somehow inferior because of skin color or country of origin, the lust to dominate is a force that must be met head on. We are called by Church and country to treat people as equals in the arenas of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Really, what else is there?

As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue. Accordingly, we will not cease to speak forcefully against and work toward ending racism.

—Open Wide our Hearts, The Enduring Call to Love, A Pastoral Letter against Racism, 2018, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Margaret Sanger.

Keep It Simple — Just Do It

Many years ago, my spiritual director was a no-nonsense nun. When I arrived for my companioning session with her, I would notice the little sign on her desk, “Just Do It.” That phrase is, of course, a trademark of the shoe company Nike. But on her desk, it spoke, not to Sister Loretta’s desire to excel at the high jump, but to her basic mindset, which resisted dithering. Decisions should be prayered about, discerned and, without handwringing, made. She was good for me because I’m a lousy decision-maker, my lists of pros and cons endless, my “yes, buts” delaying any conclusion.

Although Sister Loretta has since gone to her eternal reward, her dictate lives on with me. Keep it simple. Just do it. With January comes our cultural obsession with resolutions. For the most part, I resist this practice. Things I’ll do, pounds I’ll lose, habits I’ll develop; I see all around me, and in my own life, that New Year’s promises that rely solely on our own willpower are seldom kept.

However, Jan. 1, and every day, is a good time to notice God acting in our lives. The Benedictines have a phrase: “Always we begin again.” I find that simple dictum enormously consoling. It reminds me that God is the God of second chances, all the time. Whether it’s some old regret nagging at me, or a cookie splurge today, God is inviting me to start over, right now.

And so that little phrase, “Always we begin again” becomes something of a mantra for me in times when I need God to help me keep going.

I see a pattern here. I write down phrases that inspire me. That’s a common practice of writers. But it’s a good way for all of us to reflect on simple wisdom.

Rummaging around in a kitchen drawer, I find my favorite towel, a gift from a daughter. I hang it up to remind me of its exposure, so too must we now speak and act to expose and oppose the racism that comes from that lust to dominate. The injustice of racism and abortion are attacks on human life. They disproportionately affect people of color and other minorities who have the greatest numbers in jail and in poverty, and with the least access to health care, healthy environments and healthy diets. Let’s use January’s focus in Washington and our diocese to respect life and value the importance of being truly and completely “pro-life.”