

Dignity for all Peoples - C.W.L. Provincial

As I prepared for this presentation, I wondered how I would begin and what direction I might take, to share with you the aspect of 'dignity' for all peoples. In particular, how this would touch the Catholic Women's League, our members, individually and as a group. The dignity of the person. I began with a definition from the dictionary. Dignity - "The state or quality of being honoured with respect." It comes from the latin word "dignus" which means worthy.

To be honoured with respect. To be appreciated. To be recognized. To be loved and cherished. To be human. To be recognized as someone important. To be noticed.

I guess, when we talk about dignity - we can see that there are two directions with regards to this definition. There are those who show respect to others - and there are those who manifest a dignified stature in their being. As Catholics - I think it is important for us to look at both directions and to see how we - both show respect to others and how we act in our own person with a sense of dignity.

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have both emphasized the importance of the human person and showing dignity to all human beings. This stems from the Gospel accounts of Jesus, who demonstrated in his actions his great respect for all. Let us begin with the poor.

Jesus identified with the poor. He was always with the poor - but I am not sure he really came from a poor home. His father was a carpenter and I am sure Jesus was probably the same - so they must have made a decent living. Yet he seemed to be always around the poor. He showed great concern for him - he fed them - he taught them that they were important in God's eyes - even if human beings did not appreciate them. Others would avoid the poor - yet Jesus was always around them. They hung on his words - and they also received from him. He demonstrated dignity to them - and they felt somehow dignified by his attention.

Jesus was also around the sick. Mostly because they wanted healing and knew he possessed this power to heal. And he reached out to many sick - to make them whole again - so they could live life more fully and could be accepted by others in the community. He was not afraid to heal lepers, to give sight to the blind man, to heal the cripple's legs or to even raise the dead. He did not reserve his concern for the sick only to the

people of Israel. He healed the centurion's servant and the nobleman's daughter. He reached out to all the sick - and in doing so, I believe he showed them dignity - and respect . He did not heal everyone who was sick, - but to those who came in contact with him - even briefly - I think of the woman with the hemorrhaging for many years - his power to cure reached out to them. He valued them, even the sick and showed them dignity.

Jesus also reached out to sinners - and was compassionate the forgiving to them. His absolution to sinners was freely given and in many ways, freely received. Jesus knew that sin would taint us, make us less human, and therefore we would loose some of our dignity. I think of examples, such as the woman caught in adultery, Mary Magdelene, and people like Zaccheus and even St. Matthew the tax collector. The mercy and forgiveness of Jesus - restored their dignity - not only in their own minds and hearts, but in many ways with the people around them and the community as a whole.

Showing dignity to others. Jesus did not waver in this regard. He even showed a kind of dignity to the Romans. Render to Caesar what

belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. In a sense, this was respect and dignity of a kind - at least for Roman law.

Most evidently Jesus showed dignity to his apostles and followers, to his new family. He demonstrated it in his patience and understanding of them and their faults and failings. He admonished them, but they knew that any correction from the Lord was for their good and their growth. He was patient to remind them of their duty - especially St. Peter - “do you love me, Peter? Feed my sheep.”

If the Lord has shown us this kind of example, then how do we as members of the Catholic Women’s League do the same? We know that our Gospel call is to reach out to others - to make their needs, more prominent than our own needs - we are called to service and to assistance. As members of the league - we do that already - but united with this theme - we strive even to do even better.

Our outreach to the poor - to the sick - to the helpless, to children and to the needy - are ALL parts of the call to dignity for every person and every human being. This call also entails our outreach to one another. To our fellow members and to our families in particular. How do we show dignity to each other? We do so in our speech, in our actions, in our concern, in our

support, in our constructive criticism, in our attention to needs, in our patience and understanding, even with those who are unlike us - and maybe are in need of special encouragement and help. We are called to show dignity to one another - even the beggar at the gate. I must say, that is also a special challenge for me. We are besieged often by those begging for help, or for a hand out of some kind. How do we respond? How can we show dignity to that person?

To the teenager who seems to dwell on frustration, to the senior, who seems to nag about the same things continually and may be struggling with a little dementia or physical weakness, to the spouse, who seems to place his concerns or interests ahead of our own, to the pastor who seems unfriendly and uncooperative with our league? How do we do it? What is there to remind us?

Jesus - reminds us - for he has taught us, that each of us is made in the image and likeness of the Father. Each of us - is a vision of God's grace in one way or another. Each of us - is an instrument of God's love. And in seeing our brother and sister, we see the Lord himself. We show Him dignity - when we show it to one another.

Are we there yet? Have we achieved a full Gospel call response? I don't think so - but we are moving in the right direction.

The second aspect of dignity for all - is those who manifest a dignified stature before others. I am not including things like pride or pomposity here - but a recognition that each of us carries within themselves a sense of dignity and we are dignified in our person - by who we are and how we live.

Through our baptism we are taught that we are reborn in God. We become a **new creation** in the Lord - we are cleansed from sin, and we take on the life of immortality, the life of God in our person. That happens at our baptism and of course we learn about this and develop this new life as we grow and mature. We are more than creatures of nature - we are daughters and sons of God. This carries with it, a certain dignity and respect that we recognize in others - but it also behooves us to live a certain way, to act a certain way, to carry ourselves a certain way, to show courage in our humility in a certain way, to show respect in our person. That is why St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians uses the analogy of the body and its parts for us - for us - who are the Church.

In the last few Sundays our second reading from St. Paul has been prompting us to make sure we live lives that are becoming of who we are. “Did you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?” The Holy Spirit dwelling within us - makes us holy and calls us to live lives that are holy and blameless before God and others. St. Paul says we are to glorify God in our bodies.

What does he mean by this? Well, I think, it has to do with dignity. We are called to manifest this holiness and goodness continually in our lives. This is not easy - in fact it might even seem impossible! We look to the saints of old who have demonstrated this dignity in their person - even in the face of persecution and distress. How do we manifest that dignity of God’s Holy Spirit in us - in our everyday lives? In our interaction with others and in our person? It challenges us in our family relationships, in our work surroundings, even in our league endeavors.

I think of some of my brother bishops, and some priests who have disgraced that dignity through sinful and even criminal activities. How discouraging that can be. However we are not to be judges, but we can look at ourselves - and judge how we live up to the dignity God has instilled within us through His Holy Spirit.

We show great dignity for the Sacred Host at Mass - but when we have consumed this communion, then Christ dwells within us. Does that not bring a certain commitment and responsibility to us - who carry the Lord within? We, who are called to manifest the Lord in our being with dignity!

I know that each day, when I pray, and realize that I am a bishop in the Roman Catholic church, and that God has been generous in bestowing this privilege upon me, that I have a responsibility to this privilege and to the dignity that it carries. In a sense and in some ways, I am no longer my own person, I am Christ's - and being His - I allow His Spirit to direct and guide me. Does that mean I give up worldly responsibility and concern, not at all. It means that I now must bring to that responsibility and concern, the dignity of God - and God's grace and love.

I believe that this is the call of each of us. You and me, as members of the Church, and especially you - as members of the Catholic Women's League of the Church and Canada. Your membership is not like any other club or organization - your membership is really not something you put on and put off according to your pleasing and your need, or like a pin or a bracelet. Your membership enhances your dignity as a child of God and member of God's family. Your membership gives you the opportunity to

bring this 'dignity' of God to the world in a variety of ways, and beyond your own personal life circle. Your membership helps you to be a leader in demonstrating to others - this dignity that dwells within - this dignity we call "grace" which is our gift of sharing in God's love and life.

Dignity for all. This theme has been a challenge for me - as your spiritual advisor, but I prayed over this theme, I had a few uncomfortable nights dwelling upon it. And I know that someone else, who tackles this theme, might bring it in a completely different direction - if they chose to speak about it to you - but I chose to use these two steams or strings.

- Dignity for others, shown in word and action and modeled after the Lord himself.
- Dignity within our person - created in our baptism - manifest in our continual growth in grace by our prayer and good works.
- Dignity in being a daughter and a son, a child of God.

May this dignity carry us ever forward in our quest, to challenge others to show a similar dignity in all aspects of the life and society around us in order to bring our world to a higher level of respect for all persons in all nations, and in all walks of life. Dignity for all.

I began by using the definition: “**the state or quality of being honoured with respect**”. I hope this little talk has helped you to see dignity for all - in a special way.

Thank you

Bishop Fred Colli