

# The Sanctity of Human Life

*I call Heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live. ~ Deuteronomy 30:19*

**H**UMAN LIFE IS SACRED because God created us in his own image and likeness (see Gn 1:26-28). He intends us to be in a relationship with him. As our Creator, he alone is the Lord of Life; therefore, no one can claim the right to intentionally destroy another human being.

Each and every person must be respected. Human life must be protected absolutely from the moment of creation — the moment of conception. From

this moment on, every human being has the rights of a person, including the most important right of every person — the right to life. Scripture says, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you*” (Jer 1:5). The miracle of life is something to be greatly respected and praised:

*For thou didst form my inward parts,  
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.  
Wonderful are thy works!*

*“As our Creator, he alone is the Lord of Life.”*



*The annual January March for Life in Washington, DC*



*“From the moment of conception until the moment of natural death, every person must be defended, protected, cared for, and healed to the best of our ability.”*

*Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth (Ps 139:13-15).*

Abortion, therefore, is contrary to the moral law. This has been the teaching of the Church since the first century. At the moment of conception, God creates a human person, with the dignity and rights of every human person, in his image and likeness. He calls us to protect and defend life. *“For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning... Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image” (Gn 9:5-6).*

Just as we are called to protect, care for, and respect the unborn, we are also called to protect, care for, and respect those who are sick or handicapped. Euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It, too, is contrary to the moral law. The dignity of the human person and the right to life is not limited to those who are healthy or “perfect.”

Directly acting or omitting care in such a way as to cause death is a grave offense. However, discontinuing medical procedures that are dangerous or extraordinary can be legitimate. Here, the intention is not to cause death, but rather it is an acceptance of the inability to prevent death.

From the moment of conception until the moment of natural death, every person must be defended, protected, cared for, and healed to the best of our ability. Abortion and euthanasia, therefore, are abhorrent crimes. Cooperation in either is a grave offense against God.

Suicide is also a grave offense against the sanctity

of human life. We are responsible to accept the gift of life from God and respect him as the author of life who alone decides when life begins and when life ends. God has placed us as stewards over life; we do not own it and so it “is not ours to dispose of” (CCC 2280).

However, the Church looks with compassion on those persons who, under the weight of extreme psychological illness and depression, are driven to the point of taking their own life. Such persons the Church commends to the mercy of God, who alone has means unknown to us to bring them to repentance and a share in Christ’s mercy and forgiveness.

Individuals can forfeit their right to absolute protection of human life. Situations that can justify killing another human being involve the legitimate defense of persons and societies, since these are founded on respect for the sanctity of one’s own life. Thus, for example, **1)** the use of appropriate force to defend one’s own life against deliberate attack, **2)** the use of the death penalty by the state as punishment for heinous crimes when lesser means are ineffective to protect society, and **3)** and the use of warfare to defend a society against an aggressor when all other forms of defense have failed.

In all cases, however, deliberate murder is never condoned. Abortion, euthanasia, and suicide are all tragic effects of a society that has ceased to value the intrinsic worth of the person. It is the responsibility of all Christians to preach the Gospel of life to all who are searching and struggling for life’s meaning and fulfillment. Only through our words and actions will Christ’s message be heard: *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).*

(CCC 2258-2283)