

***Twenty-sixth Sunday Per Annum (B)***  
***September 27, 2015.***

*If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea (Mk. 9:42).*

Our Lord's words to us today are unsettling, harsh in tone; yet they clearly express what the Gospel demands of us. They are a forceful reminder of the destructive effect of scandal. A scandal is literally, a stumbling block (*scandalon*) on the path of faith, leading to unbelief. For example, if I were to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass irreverently, without dignity, devotion and a prayerful spirit, this could cause you to question the truth of Our Lord's Real Presence in the Eucharist.

As disciples of Christ and members of the Church, we know that the holiness of the Church is guaranteed because this holiness is founded on the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Holiness *within* the Church however, is the responsibility of each baptized Christian. When we sin as individuals, the harm caused by sin poses obstacles on the road to salvation for everyone. This is the social effect of sin – a ripple effect that can indeed be far-reaching, extending through time, and affecting generations and cultures.

During the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II observed a *Day of Pardon*. In an unprecedented ceremony held in St. Peter's Basilica, seven petitions and prayers were read in which the Holy Father asked for *forgiveness from the Lord for the sins, past and present, of the sons and daughters of the Church*. One of these petitions addressed sins against fundamental human rights: *God, our Father, you always hear the cry of the poor How many times have Christians themselves not recognized you in the hungry, the thirsty, and the naked, in the persecuted, the imprisoned and in those incapable of defending themselves, especially in the first stages of life?* This indifference can easily become contempt. History has taught us that when we are morally ambiguous in the face of an injustice, we can respond in three extreme ways: some as rescuers, many as collaborators, and most with indifference.

In the Western world, there is, generally speaking, a teaching of contempt in regard to the unborn child, and as a consequence, we are living in the midst of a veritable holocaust of defenceless human life in its first stages and increasingly in its latter stages. This teaching of contempt in no way originates with Church teaching because the teaching authority of the Church has repeatedly and clearly taught that from the first moment of his existence the unborn child *demand*s the unconditional respect that is morally due the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality (*Donum Dei*, CDF, 1987). If there is moral ambiguity about this issue, then this scandal has been caused and continues to be given by Catholic politicians who have not opposed anti-life legislation and what is worse, have actively lobbied and voted for such legislation. Is there anything in life more valuable than life itself?

We owe a debt of gratitude to those among us who are involved in the Pro-Life Movement. Sometimes they are ridiculed, dismissed or vilified for their dedication. They raise a prophetic voice in the moral wilderness of our society. In a secular culture that is increasingly aggressive to moral absolutes like the sanctity and inviolability of human life we must have the courage to witness to the truth, engage those who teach and propagate an attitude of contempt, and dispel any moral

ambiguity that may exist among us when it comes to life in all its stages. The conviction that all human life is sacred and inviolable is a uniquely Judeo-Christian teaching; our collective witness to this truth is sorely needed.

Next Sunday, across the nation, we who believe in the sanctity of life will once again provide a public witness in an hour of prayer and solidarity on our roadways and streets in what is known as Life Chain: a prayerful, peaceful, witness to the evil of abortion and to the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception. We will gather in front of our church and stretch out along the street in faithful witness. Life Chain is for one hour, on one day of the year. It is a simple and powerful way to spread the Gospel message, to be a light to our nation and to create once again a Culture of Life in Canada. Years ago, from time to time my dear friend Dr. Ray Holmes, who was very active in the Pro Life movement would call me and say, *'Father, Linda's in jail again. Are you up for a visit?'* He would pick me up and we would make our way to the Toronto West Detention Centre to visit Linda Gibbons, the pro-life prisoner of conscience who has spent a total of eleven years in jail in defence of life. She is a rescuer and is in no way indifferent. Please consider joining us for one hour, next Sunday at 3:00 p.m. *Will you not watch one hour with me? (Mk. 14:37)*