

## Mustard Seeds and Sunflower Seeds

October 7, 2007

Respect Life Sunday

Luke 17: 5 – 10

Sunflowers are some of my favorite flowers. They get so tall in such a brief time – you can almost see them grow! This seed head weighs about 3 lbs. and came from a plant almost 12 feet tall. All that came from a small little seed like this.

Even more of a miracle – let's take our missalettes and find the sentence in today's gospel in which the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. See that sentence? Notice the period at the end of it. Everyone in this church came from something no bigger than that period.

Yet, there's such controversy in our society over how much respect, if any, is owed to human beings that size. It's too easy to treat them casually.

Every day in abortion clinics across the country, human beings that size are being eliminated with no more concern than erasing a misplaced punctuation mark.

Fertility clinics create dozens of such beings each day, watch them grow, and then thin them like seedlings. There's a tragic irony in this. When couples lose a pregnancy, it's a grief; God is often blamed; faith is tested. When several embryos are destroyed or donated for stem cells, it seems permissible so long as one healthy baby is the result.

Two kinds of clinics: both treating life casually, for completely different reasons.

Some say we should pay no mind to such small, obviously unimportant beings. They don't feel, talk, complain, vote, hire lawyers or lobbyists. Yet the church warns us, we ignore them at our own peril and we cannot eliminate them, use them as commodities for our own advantage or manage them like laboratory animals.

We cannot flick these human beings away and then try to preach with integrity about caring for the homeless, or orphans, or peace, or the environment. To some groups there will always be others who are irrelevant or less than human. How do we refute ethnic cleansing, racism, sexism, ageism – hateful discrimination of any kind – if we make some of the same selections at the very beginning of life.

How do we even justify the sanctity of our own lives, if we continued in being only by the whim of our parents or a laboratory worker?

The church doesn't have easy answers, but one thing I love about our Church at its best - it's not afraid to ask the questions, and teach what may be difficult.

Surprisingly, *Evangelium vitae* doesn't dogmatically assert that human beings have souls when they are punctuation-sized. Who can say for certain the precise moment when the soul enters or leaves the body, asks Pope John Paul II. Yet precisely because we are uncertain, the entire human adventure of life must be protected from beginning to end. More strangely still, why

would we permit those who don't believe the question is even pertinent to make medical and moral decisions for us?

Our society is very confused! But what can *we do*? Sometimes we are asked to march for life, or pray, but this Sunday we are asked to become better informed. Read what our church teaches about abortion, in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research and why. Not simply what the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* say the church teaches, but what our bishops and popes have taught.

This election day we will be asked on our ballots whether or not to use public funds to finance human embryonic stem cell research. By now we all know that the Church supports **adult** stem cell research. It kills no human beings and is yielding clinical successes. **Embryonic** stem cell research, however, kills developing human embryos and could not be used even if the morally and scientifically acceptable alternative of adult stem cell research did not exist.

The question is : "Should public funds be used to set up laboratories where human embryos are grown and thinned like seedlings?" The church says "No, not for any reason."

Ethical alternatives exist for all the moral dilemmas we've confronted this Respect Life Sunday. Adoption is one viable option for abortion. **NaPro** technology can give infertile couples the child they want so dearly with success rates higher than most in-vitro clinics and using morally acceptable medical means. Adult stem cell research has yielded clinical success and is an ethically laudable alternative to human embryonic stem cell destruction.

Become informed about Church teaching. Pray. Then vote.