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**“And the Light Shines in the Darkness”**

**Talk No. 44**

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**“The Light Shines in the Darkness, and Must Do So, Even Today”**

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These days one would have to be blind or deaf, not to read in the newspapers or hear on radio or watch on television, the unrelenting attack by so many commentators against the Catholic Church, going on for years in the United States, and now more recently in Western Europe, for the shameful deeds of a few. One commentator went so far as to say: “This may be the end of the Catholic Church.” I thought to myself, you foolish man. It is not the end of the Catholic Church, but rather of Western Civilization whose flawed leaders, by misusing words such as, freedom, choice, equality, have anesthetized the people into passively accepting the removal from the Laws of the Land, all Judaic and Christian values. Without these ethical foundations, Western Civilization will collapse and perish into barbarism. For it was the implementing of the moral values found in God’s Commandments and the recognition in Law of the absolute value of every human life created by God, that made the Laws in Western Civilization great and admired.

The late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen 1895-1979 said that: “It is a characteristic of any decaying civilization, that the great masses of the people are unconscious of the tragedy. Humanity in a crisis is generally insensitive, to the gravity of the times in which it lives. Men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because they have no standard outside of themselves, by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice, how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith, really know, what is happening in the world; the great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on, because they have lost the vision of the heights from which they have fallen.”

Country after Country through the legalization of abortifacient contraceptives, abortion, euthanasia, embryo stem cell research, therapeutic cloning etc. is institutionalizing a structure of sin and death. Organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations too often are becoming the problem, and not the answer, due to certain powerful people and groups who manipulate even these institutions into implementing their worldwide culture of death agenda.

Thus tragically today the light of life, for far too many innocents human beings, is going out, especially across America and Western Europe without a whimper from the majority. The light has been dimmed ever so slowly, so that many without realizing it, have acclimated themselves to live in moral darkness; others are already despairing of the hope of a new dawn; while those being born into the darkness, accept it as the normal condition.

Where and to whom can the people of the World turn, to find vision and hope and light for this World and its people?. The Evangelist John tells us the answer in the very beginning of his Gospel, by unveiling for us the moment, that eternity broke into time, into the human condition. Saint John tells us that: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the

darkness has not overcome it. Furthermore the Evangelist tells us, that God sent a man called John the Baptist, who was not the light but was to bear witness to him who was the light. He was in the world, and the world was made through him and the World knew him not. Then follows one of the saddest lines in Scripture. He came unto his own and his own received him not. Since Christ the Light and His teachings was rejected by so many in Jesus' own life time, it ought not to surprise or scandalize or overwhelm us, when it happens in our lifetime that the Church through whom the Risen Christ continues to bring His Light to the World; that the Church and her teachings is also rejected today by so many. What is the mentality of modern man and the environment in our society that impedes an openness to accepting the Gospel of Life?

The late great philosopher, Dietrich von Hildebrand 1889-1977, whom Pope Pius XII called the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Doctor of the Church, in his book *The New Tower of Babel* succinctly describes the hostile environment that stunts or hinders the growth of the tree of life in our times. For Von Hildebrand our present age reveals a consistent anti-Christian conception in every domain of life on the part of the enemies of Christianity. The present crisis is man's attempt to free himself from his condition as a created being, to deny his metaphysical situation, to disengage himself from all bonds with anything greater than himself. Man endeavors to build a new Tower of Babel.

Von Hildebrand wrote that for modern man the two main forms of freeing ourselves from our condition of creatures finds its expression in the individualistic self sufficiency as it is found in many Western democratic countries or the collective anti-personalism as it is represented by Communist and Socialistic countries.. Von Hildebrand laid his chief stress on the individual self-sufficiency mentality since for many its danger is less obvious than the vision of hell embodied in totalitarianism.

This individualistic self sufficiency is characterized by the rejection of all bonds linking us to God and to the moral law. The modern man who is affected by this perversion, refuses to conform to the call of value, to surrender, to submit to something for its own sake, for the sake of its own intrinsic nobility and sublimity. Reverence, obedience, gratitude are often alien to him. He does not want to abandon himself; on the contrary everything becomes a means for his arbitrary pleasure and satisfaction. He looks upon marriage as something with which he can deal according to his arbitrary mood and not a holy bond, something sublime that he is compelled to respect. He contracts marriages and gets divorces as he exchanges one glove for another. Instead of seeing children a gift from God, he himself wants to determine their number by birth control. On the one hand, he believes himself entitled to shorten the lives of others and his own by euthanasia, when they seem to him no longer worth while; on the other hand, he wishes to become forgetful of death.

Further, he no longer wants to admit the existence of that factor in our life as creatures, which is often called 'chance' and which a Christian calls Providence. He himself wants to determine everything; he seeks to replace the rhythm of a truly human life with its constant dependence upon factors that we cannot ourselves control-the element of surprise, of a gift bestowed upon us, of bliss and trial-with a human insurance against all the unforeseen and unforeseeable elements.

He no longer approaches beauty in nature and art with reverence, as something reflecting a higher world above him. He does not want to be raised above himself, to emerge from his own accustomed atmosphere, but he wants beauty to be drawn into his realm as mere fun and entertainment. He wants to be himself the source of all authority in community life. His is no longer the conception of democracy, which provides that the individual shall be free, to determine the structure and the laws of community life according to the objective norms of right and wrong, in which freedom consists in the fact that one is called to co-operate in finding what is objectively right. His concept of democracy means that the majority arbitrarily decides what is right and wrong, that the arbitrary will of the individual is the very source of right and wrong, replacing the objective norm.

And yet in spite of this mentality of the modern man as expressed by the philosopher von Hildebrand, we must be witness to the truths of the Gospel in season and out of season, not forgetting that there is a grace that goes with the truth that does not go with the lie. There is actually a twofold grace, one given to the one who speaks the truth and a grace is given to the hearer, the listener to accept the truth. And so we must be faithful, confident ambassadors of the truth. And this mission of proclaiming the truth, the living Church of Christ continues to do so, remaining perpetually young, enduring from age to age even though civilizations come and go.

As a living organization then, the Church keeps proclaiming the truth and responding to the errors of each age. The Holy Spirit continues to proclaim the light of truth especially through the successor of Peter and the other Apostles. Living through these years where a culture of death has taken such deep roots, the Church has had to respond to each error as the tree of death grew and spread its branches. That is why in our times the Church has promulgated not one, by three different documents, written by three different Popes with the word *Vitae*, of Life included in each of its titles, *Humanae Vitae*, *Donum Vitae* and *Evangelium Vitae*. In July 1968 Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae, of Human Life*, was responding to the culture of death's attack on the Family as God's creation and the process of procreation as God intended it. In February 1987, Pope Benedict XVI, then known as Cardinal Ratzinger in *Donum Vitae, the Gift of Life*, was responding to the culture of death's attack on life in the womb from conception unto birth. And Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae, the Gospel of Life*, was declaring the sacredness of life from the womb to the tomb, against the attack on life after birth through euthanasia.

This week we have been blessed to hear speaker after speaker, provide for us a comprehensive understanding of the teachings and vision of the Church on the sacredness of life, from conception to natural death. This is important since Christ continues His work today through us whom he calls and challenges to be the Light of the World. It is our responsibility to make the Vision known and realized even in our times. Our job, our privilege then is not only to learn the Gospel of Life and to live it in our own personal lives but to proclaim to the World in darkness. We must all become in some way active members in the pro-life movement in our own Countries.

I believe most knowledgeable people would readily agree that the pro-life movement in the United States is very much alive and strong, thirty-seven years after the infamous January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1973 U.S. Supreme Court Decision *Roe vs. Wade*. No small reason for this vitality was the work of a Bishop, actually a Cardinal, who from 1973 until his death in 1983, was the Chairman of the Bishop's Committee for Pro-Life Activities in the United States. He was largely responsible for setting up the United States Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities to work for and to defend the most defenseless members of society. The Plan involved an educational, pastoral care and public policy agenda. All during those ten years, unknown to most people, the Cardinal himself was engaged in a personal struggle with cancer until Oct. 6<sup>th</sup> 1983, the day the God of Life took the Cardinal of Life, home. He was simply referred to as the beloved Terence Cardinal Cooke, 1921 – 1978 and was considered by many, even before he died, as a gentle living saint.

For Respect Life Month, which in America was designated as October, Cardinal Cooke wrote a pastoral letter, which was to be read in all the Catholic Churches on Sunday Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> 1973. Indeed it was read, but three days after the Cardinal's own death on October 6<sup>th</sup>. In closing I would like to share with you some moving wise thoughts expressed by that saintly Cardinal, in his final letter to pro-lifers and to all peoples of good will.

The Cardinal said: "From the depths of my being, I urge you to reject this anti-life, anti-child, anti-human view of life and to oppose with all your strength the deadly technologies of life destruction which daily result in the planned death of the innocent and the helpless. Together we must search for the ways to

demonstrate this conviction in our daily lives and in our public institutions. In doing so, we must never be discouraged or give up. Too much is at stake, 'the gift of life' itself.

The 'gift of life,' God's special gift, is no less beautiful when it is accompanied by illness or weakness, hunger or poverty, mental or physical handicaps, loneliness or old age. Indeed, at these times, human life gains extra splendor as it requires our special care, concern and reverence. It is in and through the weakest of human vessels that the Lord continues to reveal the power of His love.

At this grace-filled time in my life, as I experience suffering in union with Jesus, Our Lord and Redeemer, I offer gratitude to Almighty God for giving me the opportunity to continue my apostolate on behalf of life. I thank each of you, my sisters and brothers in the Archdiocese of New York and throughout our nation, for what you have done and will do on behalf of human life. May we never yield to indifference or claim helplessness, when innocent human life is threatened or when human rights are denied."

With you, I entrust our efforts to the care of Our Lady who, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception to the present, has been the refuge for the poorest and most forgotten among God's people. The Cardinal concluded his pastoral letter by saying: "May God bless you always and give you His peace."

Today we all know that for seventy years the Communists leaders especially, in the Eastern European Countries, tried to impose on the peoples in those countries, the cross of atheism, namely the creature without the creator and the subordination of the individual to the State, as Savior. The Communist experiment failed because millions of peoples were not indifferent or not whelmed by a sense of helplessness but rather practiced heroic martyrdom or passive resistance in rejecting the lie, that the creature does not need the Creator and fallen humanity does not needs a true Redeemer. Indeed fallen humanity needs a Redeemer, and the Redeemer is not the State, but is a Person, Jesus Christ, Who is forever the Life and Light of the World. Here in the West and around the world the Helpers also, will never accept the culture of death as the normal condition and together with all those working for life, will never stop working for a New Dawn.

Finally may I conclude my own remarks by repeating to each of you the Cardinal's final admonition: "May we never yield to indifference or claim helplessness when innocent human life is threatened or when human rights are denied." And in this relentless battle of restoring or maintaining a true humanism, a Christian humanism, may God bless each of you, always and give you His peace. Amen.