

Wednesday of the 5th Week of Lent

Homily of Bishop John O. Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

April 1, 2020

“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Our knowing, loving, and living of objective truth makes us truly free to be heroically and courageously holy.

So often our culture presents sin as the road to freedom. This is a sad mirage which leads so many to addiction and self-destruction.

Whether it is the objective truths in regard to the Sacred Scriptures and our Catholic Biblical Theology, whether it is the objective truths contained in the Apostle’s Creed we proclaim every Sunday, whether it is the objective truths of God’s grace flowing through the Seven Sacraments, whether it is the objective truths concerning every dimension of the Ten Commandments and Catholic Moral Teaching, or whether it is the objective truths about our Catholic Spiritual Theology and the teaching of the Catholic saints and mystics on prayer, the truth forms our minds, hearts, consciences and souls, and enables us to be truly free and truly holy.

As we look forward to celebrating the May 18, 2020 Centenary of the birth of St. John Paul II, we remember so many different dimensions of his philosophical, theological, spiritual, human rights and missionary legacy.

For instance, in his 1993 encyclical *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*, St. John Paul II expresses how essential it is for the common good of global society that we promote and uphold objective moral truth.

He writes: “Genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God’s eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness.” (95)

In these COVID-19 times, we have seen a rediscovery right before our eyes of the sense and understanding of the sanctity and value of every individual life at every stage of life as health care professionals and first responders put their lives on the line each and every day.

This past Monday, March 30th, I wrote a letter of appreciation on National Doctors Day to our Catholic Health Services Doctors that I would like to share with you.

Dear Catholic Health Services Doctors:

“On this National Doctors' Day, I remembered you all at Mass and want to thank you, your families and your staffs for your exceptional dedication and spirit of sacrifice as you compassionately serve the sick and suffering, live the Catholic mission expressed in our Catholic Health Services on Long Island, and continue your efforts to defeat COVID-19.

Know how much we all appreciate your dedicated work, your courage and your commitment to (the objective truth) of the sanctity of human life at every stage of life. It is a powerful and

compelling witness for the common good. Our prayers are with you and every Doctor and hospital on Long Island at every moment in these challenging times.”

Our shared belief in the objective truth of the sanctity of human life is the freedom that propels such heroism and courage among so many in these challenging times.

This past March 25th, we celebrated another dimension of St. John Paul II’s legacy, the 25th Anniversary of his encyclical *The Gospel of Human Life (Evangelium Vitae)*.

His words at the beginning of the encyclical are so poignant 25 years later as we experience the tragedies and traumas of the COVID-19 crisis.

He writes: “The Church knows that this *Gospel of life*, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person – believer and non-believer alike – because it marvelously fulfills all the heart’s expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Romans 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.”