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Statements

## **Respect Life Sunday Unheralded heroes at work among us**

*October 3, 2001*

On Oct. 7, Respect Life Sunday, the Catholic Church in the United States encourages us to reflect in a special way on the gift of human life. We are asked to prayerfully examine our attitudes toward each human being and to renew our commitment to protecting life at all its stages.

In some ways, it seems a terrible irony to observe "Respect Life Sunday" less than a month after the tragic events of Sept. 11. How can we begin to talk about protecting all human life, when thousands of innocent people are murdered before the world's eyes? How can we perceive life as "sacred" when young men willingly waste their own lives in an attempt to harm as many other people as possible?

Yet again, God surprises us. His love triumphs over death in the many acts of heroism and self-sacrifice that followed the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania: firefighters who gave their lives to save others, people who waited for hours to donate blood for victims, the man who comforted a quadriplegic until the World Trade Center collapsed around them. These people remind us that every person, even the most vulnerable, is worthy of unconditional love and protection.

However, the less visible attacks on innocent life continue today in our country. As the images of the terrorist destruction dominate our televisions, unborn children quietly die by the thousands each day through the crime of abortion. Human embryos are destroyed in hopes they may someday produce a cure for various diseases. Policies advanced by assisted-suicide advocates imply that the sick and elderly are burdens to their families and society.

What happened on Sept. 11 reminds us that we are all vulnerable as human beings. It also calls us to reflect seriously on our own culture, which devalues human life in so many ways and exports those values to other parts of the world. May we redouble our efforts to provide a model of freedom that respects human life from conception until natural death.

We want to take this opportunity to thank all those unheralded heroes who strive to save innocent lives every day of the year. There are counselors who work with pregnant women in need. There are parents who adopt children and provide them with loving homes. There are people who care for the elderly or disabled to help them live with dignity.

Throughout his pontificate, Pope John Paul II has echoed the words of the resurrected Jesus: "Be not afraid!" (Mt 28:10). Let's go forward with renewed courage in the coming year, recommitting ourselves to building a culture of life in our homes, in our nation and in the world. Contact your parish or the archdiocesan Respect Life Office (303-715-3205) to find out how you may work with others to bring about a culture of life.

And please pray in a special way for our country's leaders, that the decisions they make within our own borders and beyond will respect the life and God-given dignity of each human being.

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