



*I remind you, to stir into flame
the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.
For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice
but rather of power and love and self-control.
So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,
nor of me, a prisoner for his sake;
but bear your share of hardship for the gospel
with the strength that comes from God.*

1 Tim 1: 6-8

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

St. Paul shares with the early Christians some of his frustrations as he exhorts them to speak up and tell the people about what they have learned about Jesus and how they have come to believe in Him as Savior. It was a difficult time for these early Christians. If they spoke about Jesus, they were persecuted and put to death. They were quieted by the crowds who had other, more popular beliefs. The early Christians are relying on St. Paul to be their voice and he is saying to them that God did not give them a spirit of cowardice; that they shouldn't be ashamed of their testimony to God.

I sometimes feel like St. Paul as I receive phone calls or emails or letters from you asking me what I am doing about the sinfulness of society or something that was published in the newspaper or told by a neighbor. We are all called to enkindle a deeper faith in the hearts of the people; this is not something that is reserved simply for the ordained or religious sisters. Each one of us has a unique responsibility to act as God has called us through our baptism; to live through, with and in God.

In order to share our faith and stir it into flame, we must also know what we believe. We must attend to prayer, to study, to participate in the Sacraments, to make God a part of our language, the wholeness of our being. To live our faith is not something relegated to a particular hour but it is a 24/7/365 undertaking. St. Paul asks the early Christians to bear their share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. Living our faith 24/7/365 is a hardship and a challenge when we live in a world in which what we believe is distorted by secularism or the lure of false gods distracts our attention away from God.

Pope Francis commented that Christians can respond to the world's 'astuteness,' with their own, namely through a gift of the Holy Spirit. "This refers," Pope Francis explained, "to depart from the spirit and values of the world, which the devil likes, in order to live according to the Gospel."

"And worldliness, how is it manifested?" he asked. "Worldliness is manifested by attitudes of corruption, deception, abuse of power, and constitutes the most wrong road, the road of sin,

because one thing brings you to another! It's like a chain (vicious cycle), even if – it is true – that it is generally the easiest one to follow.”

Pope Francis continues and says that, while the path to depart from the spirit and values of the world may be a hardship, he says to “walk it with energy and determination, relying on God's grace and the support of His Spirit.”

As Catholics, we find this path particularly daunting as we celebrate Respect Life Month this October. We are frustrated because our beliefs may not echo the ways of the world. We seek to be transparent before God and to be open to God. We are created out of nothing as pure gift by the God of love and when we offend God, when we sin, out of this free love we are again redeemed by Christ and the Holy Spirit leads us back to our true happiness and our true home. In this understanding of our entire being as a pure gift of God, we are asked not to destroy ourselves but to respect ourselves. This respect is born out of the dignity as we are a gift of God. Through our entire being we bring forth God's love to spread throughout the land.

But, we can't choose when we want to respect life and when we don't. Respecting life from conception to natural death involves each person's entire lifetime, not just at the beginning or the end. All of us are called to respect life and care for it. God's love is unitive not divisive. How might our judgements or words of disgust fail to respect life? When we speak with each other about our beliefs, we must speak with mercy. We are called to break the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness so that our every action will be of God.

The 30th Annual State-wide Respect Life Conference is being held October 14-15 at Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church in Winter Park. The Conference presents a wonderful opportunity to refresh or learn anew about the Church's teaching on Respect Life. If you have not already registered, I encourage you to do so.

May we stir into flame the gift of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Noonan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John Noonan
Bishop, Diocese of Orlando