This is Respect Life Sunday. The American Catholic bishops began Respect Life Sunday in 1972. Since that time, Catholics across the country observe the month of October to advance the culture of life. If we want to see what this really means, we might look into the home of Tom and Lena Hudson, just outside of Chicago. The Hudsons are a big Catholic family! They named their seventh child Sarah. When Sarah was born, she weighed only 4 pounds. She had a serious genetic problem caused by the presence of an extra chromosome. Former Senator Rick Santorum's daughter suffered from the same condition. Little Sarah was not expected to develop past the level of a nine-month-old. Unable to talk or stand or sit for long periods of time, she beat the odds. Doctors didn't think she would live one year. Sarah's mother was once interviewed about how she was raising a child with those struggles, along with everybody else in the family. She explained that all the other kids pitched in and helped out with Sarah. “They have learned to be selfless”, she said. “Every day they see someone who needs more care than they do”. Yet the family had real joy in the home. Sarah loved to laugh and everyone joined in. Her mother Lena said, “Sarah is our path to heaven”. If we want to know what it means to respect life we might look no further.

To respect life is to give it dignity at every stage, with all its beauty and struggles, its sacrifices, its wonder and uncertainty. Respect Life Sunday reminds us not to overlook the ways in which our culture fails to respect life or turns a blind eye. It happens in abortion facilities, in schoolyards where children are bullied or beaten up. It can happen anywhere when the search for justice and peace are replaced by the search for greed and selfishness. In 1983, then Cardinal Joseph Bernardin gave his well-known speech on the ‘seamless garment’. He rightly called for a broad vision that would include reverence for the sacredness of all human life, from beginning to end. It includes opposition to a wide spectrum of evils, not just abortion. 12 years ago the United States Catholic bishops said this in their document titled “Living the Gospel of Life” -- “to focus on the evil of deliberate killing in abortion and euthanasia is not to ignore the many other urgent conditions that demean human dignity and threaten human rights. Opposing abortion and euthanasia does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing and healthcare”. But we start at the start; we begin at the beginning. Sometimes we hear people say something like
this, “I know abortion and artificial contraception are wrong; but those are not the only relevant life issues. What about war, the nuclear buildup, economic injustice and so on?” Of course healthcare, education, economic security, immigration and taxes are very important matters. But the solution to those issues does not usually involve a direct rejection of the sanctity of human life in the way that abortion does. In other words, all these issues do not carry the same moral weight. LOOK! What good does being right on taxes, education, health care, immigration and the economy do for someone who’s lying in a coffin? The best health and education systems, the fairest immigration laws, and the most stable economy do nothing for a child who never sees the light of day. Nearly 50 million abortions have been performed in the United States since 1973. One would be too many. Yet no war, natural disaster, illness or disability has claimed so great a toll. I hope that everyone will take part in the rosary and Life Chain tomorrow afternoon. We should have the strongest turnout of any church in the city.

In closing, there may be men and women listening today who have been involved in abortion. Remember, there’s mercy for you in the blood of the Lamb. There’s forgiveness at the foot of the cross. There’s healing flowing from the red rivers of redemption that came from His hands and feet and side. As Catholic Christians, we can receive forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us turn to Mary in this Respect Life month, asking her to shape us more and more into the image of her Son. That we may always be people of life, in word and deed; reverencing life from its natural start to its natural end. Let us petition the Mother of God to intercede for our nation, for civil authorities and legislators, that all human life will be protected from conception until natural death.

God love you!