

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

Study Guide by the SISTERS OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The first sentence of an encyclical is very important, as it sets the course for the entire document. In the first sentence of this encyclical, John Paul II makes a stunning claim: "The Gospel of Life is at the heart of Jesus' message." He later writes, "*The Gospel of God's love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel*" (Evangelium Vitae 1). God became man to save us from sin; the heartbeat of that salvation is the truth of the inestimable value of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God. How does this affect your understanding of the Gospel? Of yourself?

2. John Paul II writes that "Christmas also reveals the full meaning of every human birth, and the joy which accompanies the Birth of the Messiah is thus seen to be the foundation and fulfillment of joy at every child born into the world (cf. Jn 16:21)" (EV 1). Think of the fact that you were *born*. Reflect on the reality that your existence, your birth, is a cause of joy to the heart of God. Is this how you see yourself in your day-to-day?

3. Jesus calls us into "that 'new' and 'eternal' life which consists in communion with the Father", in which "all the aspects and stages of human life achieve their full significance." How have you noticed in your heart a longing for communion/relationship? How have you seen communion with others and God bring fullness to your heart?

4. We are called to "a fullness of life... [which] consists in sharing the very life of God." The reality that our life on earth is "penultimate" and "sacred reality" invites us to share the "sacred reality" of our lives, which "is brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters" (EV 2). Have you had an experience of the making a gift of your self (i.e. shared your heart, time, talent, etc. with others), and it leading to a greater personal flourishing? A deeper connection with God?

5. "By His incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being'. This saving event reveals to humanity...the boundless love of God...[and] *the incomparable value of every human person*" (EV 2). Christ died for every person. This truth invites me to look at every individual in its light. How do I find myself reacting to this invitation? Is there someone in my life who has hurt me, or with whom I struggle? Is there someone I need to forgive?

6. "Every individual...is entrusted to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt at the Church's very heart..." (EV 3). How is this possible? This can only be possible if Christ and His Church are one. Reflect on this.

7. St. John Paul II expands upon a passage from a document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, citing a list of specific offenses against human life. What are you thinking as you read this list? Are there any that you struggle with or disagree with? Why or why not?

8. How do you see the expansion of offenses against the human person today?

9. How does making an action legal affect the common perception of that action? How have you seen a confusion or darkening of consciences in the world? In the media? Are you familiar with the voice of your own conscience?

10. John Paul II writes that this encyclical is “meant to be a...pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: *respect, protect, love, and serve life, every human life!* Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!” (EV 5) Have you ever felt a responsibility to speak or to act on behalf of human life? How do you think God might be calling you to respond to the urgent appeal to “respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life”?