

Therefore, he continued:

“The Church ... is called to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life, and to promote a culture of life. ... This is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people’s hearts.”³

Our Holy Father urged us to let our daily prayer to the Father—“Thy Kingdom come!”—bear fruit in the way we lead our lives and build up our families and communities. He added: “Praying fervently for the coming of the Kingdom ... means overcoming every separation between faith and life, and countering false gospels of freedom and happiness. It also means rejecting a false dichotomy between faith and political life.”⁴

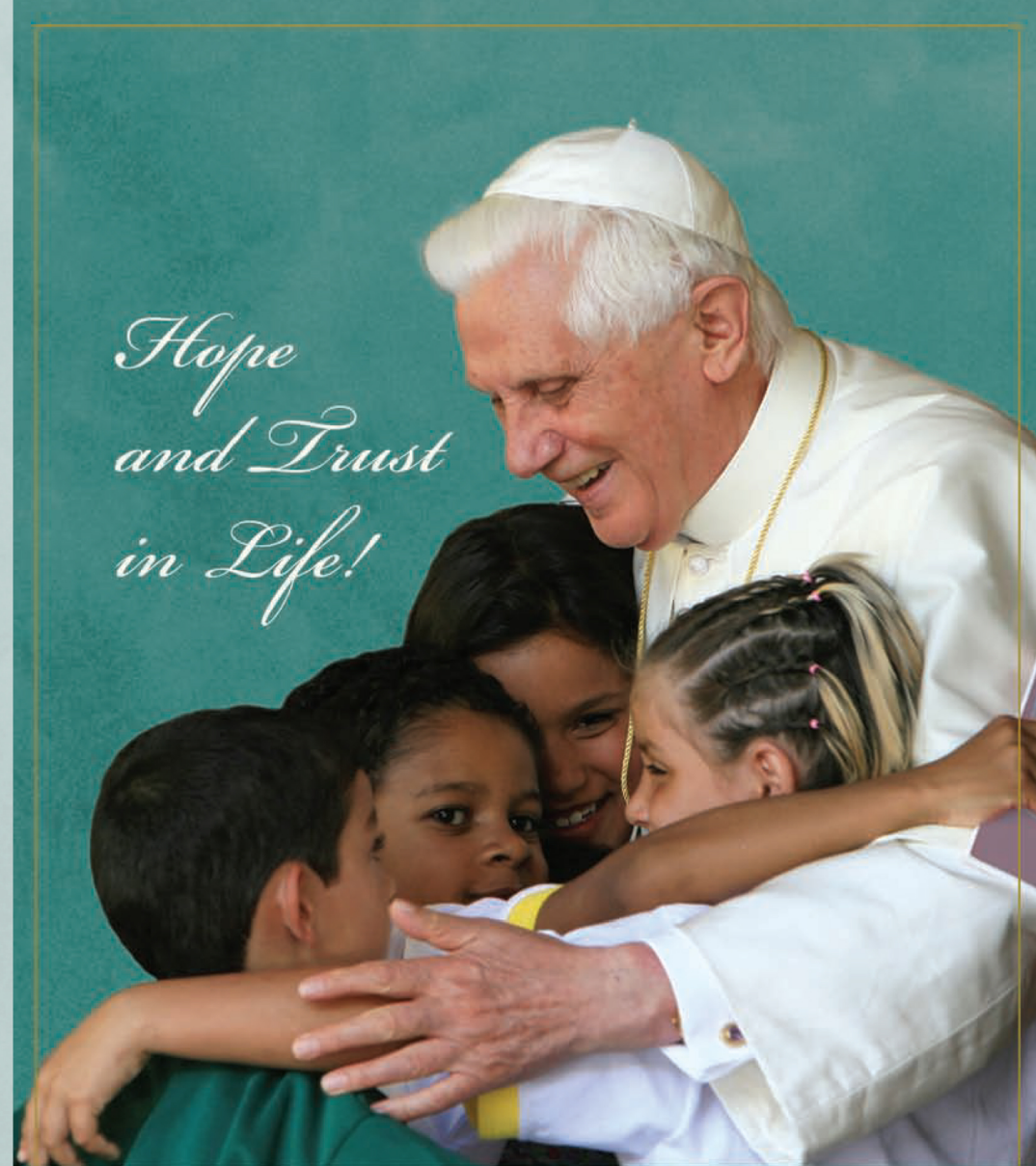
Through the sacraments and meditative prayer, we can rediscover the truth and joy of Christian life fully lived for God and for others. By letting the love of Jesus Christ permeate our lives and actions in defense of our vulnerable brothers and sisters, we can transform our nation, building a culture where all people can again hope and trust in life!

¹ These are available at
www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/travels/2008/index_stati-uniti_en.htm.

² Pope Benedict XVI, Responses to the Questions Posed by the American Bishops, April 16, 2008.

³ Homily, Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, April 19, 2008.

⁴ Homily, Mass at Yankee Stadium, April 20, 2008.



RESPECT LIFE



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In April 2008, the United States was blessed by the pastoral visit of Pope Benedict XVI.

Americans discovered in our Holy Father a man of immense intellectual gifts, great wisdom and an unparalleled knowledge of today's geopolitical, social and cultural realities. They also discovered a kindly, gentle priest imbued with humility, with holiness and love. Still, he would be the first to say that the trip was not about him.

God sent Pope Benedict to us with a message, one that doesn't lend itself to the ten-second sound bites and rapid-cycling images of today's media. We Christians in the United States can benefit greatly from carefully reading his talks and homilies,¹ from reflecting on his message and asking ourselves: "How does this message apply to my life?"

In his meeting with the Catholic bishops of the U.S., Pope Benedict affirmed that our country "is marked by a genuinely religious spirit," but this spirit is all too often confined to our places and times of worship:

The subtle influence of secularism can ... color the way people allow their faith to influence their behavior. Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death?

The answers to these questions are obvious. But have we really considered the consequences of this gap between our profession of faith and our living it out? Under "America's brand of secularism," Pope Benedict explains:

Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things "out there" are true, but without practical relevance for everyday life. The result is a

growing separation of faith from life: living "as if God did not exist." This is aggravated by an individualistic and eclectic approach to faith and religion: far from a Catholic approach to "thinking with the Church," each person believes he or she has a right to pick and choose, maintaining external social bonds but without an integral, interior conversion to the law of Christ. Consequently, rather than being transformed and renewed in mind, Christians are easily tempted to conform themselves to the spirit of this age (cf. Rom 12:3). We have seen this emerge in an acute way in the scandal given by Catholics who promote an alleged right to abortion.²



By treating religious faith as an isolated set of beliefs that is irrelevant to our personal and political decisions, Americans have allowed a culture of death to take root and spread. While it is easy to cite politicians who publicly sever their "personal" religious beliefs from their voting behavior, each of us falls short of living out our beliefs perfectly and consistently.

What is meant by the expression "culture of death"? It is a pervasive attitude that accepts the intentional killing of an innocent human being as a solution to a social or economic problem. The broad acceptance of abortion, "mercy" killing, assisted suicide, population control measures, abortifacients marketed as "contraceptives," and the destruction of human embryos for research signal how far we still need to go to build a society where all understand that every human life is sacred because each of us is created, loved and redeemed by God.

Pope Benedict encourages us to be clear in our beliefs, act consistently with them, and be animated in our efforts to transform our culture. "The proclamation of life, life in abundance, must be the heart of the new evangelization," said Pope Benedict in his homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral. "For true life—our salvation—can only be found in the reconciliation, freedom and love which are God's gracious gift."