Vulnerable, Yet Strong

by Kimberly Baker

As we near the conclusion of Lent with Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum, we enter into deeper reflection on the Passion of Christ. Both God and man, Christ humbled himself to experience very deep suffering and even Death. This sacrifice of love ultimately led to triumph over sin and evil and made salvation possible for each of us. Christ's Passion invites us to reflect on the very real connection between vulnerability and strength.

There is something about vulnerability—its humility, its directness, the capacity to be hurt—that is frightening and uncomfortable. Yet, how many human endeavors require vulnerability as a pre-requisite for success? Romantic relationships begin with the risk of rejection. Athletic training carries with it the risk of injury and pain. In wartime, the soldier who faces his enemy is at his most vulnerable, yet also at his most courageous. A person who is willing to be vulnerable has a chance at succeeding at any number of things. Vulnerability requires a certain boldness.

And here we see a strange contradiction: a person who refuses to be vulnerable may actually be very fragile inside, whereas a person who knows how to be vulnerable in a healthy way may have a lot of internal strength. This positive kind of vulnerability might be manifested in choosing to face new challenges, giving generously in the different aspects of life, and finding security in Christ's love and therefore freedom from fear of personal weaknesses or setbacks. If vulnerability can be connected with interior strength and contribute to growth on the personal level, the same is true for our culture, especially in how it views its weak and dependent members.

In his encyclical letter, *Spe Salvi* (*Saved in Hope*), Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through 'com-passion' is a cruel and inhuman society" (no. 38). When we refuse to accept and support the weak and suffering members of society, we lose our compassion as individuals and become less human. Society does not improve by disregarding its weaker members; it instead stifles love and care for others by setting increasingly narrow standards on what lives are acceptable and what lives are "burdensome" or "worthless."

The pro-life perspective does not fear vulnerability in the human condition—it embraces it. A culture of life does not pressure people to live up to an artificial standard of health or physical perfection in order to feel a sense of self-worth and purpose. Rather, each person is regarded as special and unique, as a gift to the community in a profound way, no matter their state of health and mental or physical abilities. A society that reaches out to and accompanies its weaker members in their suffering and vulnerability is a truly strong and courageous one.

Our acceptance of our vulnerability, individually and as a society, is the measure of our humanity. Let us remember how immensely we are loved by God—especially when we are vulnerable—and how greatly we are valued in his eyes, no matter our physical or social condition. As we meditate on the suffering of Christ during Holy Week, let us not be afraid to walk in his footsteps as we spread this beautiful pro-life message to others. For in Christ we have our greatest example of someone who could be vulnerable, yet strong.

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