

RESPECT LIFE NOVENA

Day 1

Intercession: May every person's life be protected and cared for from conception to natural death.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Mary's, Glory Be*

Reflection: God has loved you from all eternity and longs for a close relationship with *you*. In Scripture, He says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). God has made you in His image and likeness, allowing you to share in and reflect His own glory. You were chosen by God, created *out of love* and *for love*. Your life is sacred, unique, irreplaceable, and good. And this reality is true for every human person. Each time we encounter another, we are standing on holy ground.

Human life is sacred at every moment and in every circumstance. The vulnerability of new life, the frailties of old age, and the challenges we face in between never diminish our God-given dignity. The life each of us has been given is always worth living. It is a gift that we are called to cherish and protect because God has willed us to exist through His love. And the same is true for the lives of others. Understanding our own goodness and dignity helps us see the sacredness of *every* human person. In response, we are called to treat each person accordingly—to welcome, care for, protect, and defend the gift of every person's life from its very beginning to its natural end.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Fast from one meal today.
- Pray the Rosary (or a decade) for today's intention (usccb.org/how-to-pray-the-rosary).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: In 1995, Pope St. John Paul II wrote *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This prophetic encyclical reaffirmed the value and inviolability of human life and urged all people to respect, protect, love, and serve every human life. Learn more about the essential teachings of this profound document in, "The Gospel of Life: A Brief Summary" (respectlife.org/gospel-of-life-summary).

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Day 2

Intention: May every child in his or her mother's womb be protected in law and welcomed in love.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Mary's, Glory Be*

Reflection: Scripture tells us that God fashioned human life in His image and likeness as the crown of all creation—but He didn't stop there. His love for us was so great that He became human, further elevating the dignity of our humanity. Jesus was conceived in the womb of the

Blessed Mother and, like each one of us, grew and developed as a preborn child beneath the shelter of His mother's heart. This simultaneously reveals the undeniable humanity of preborn children and the intrinsic value of all human life.

Abortion tragically rejects these truths, ending the life of a child and harming those involved in a variety of ways. Like the Blessed Mother, we are called to welcome, protect, and nurture the gift of new life from its first and most fragile moments. Following Jesus means caring for and protecting those who are most vulnerable and helping others to do the same. May each of us work to ensure life is protected and cherished in our laws and in our hearts.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Disconnect for the day. Use your phone only for *essential* tasks and communication. Silence or mute notifications and alerts from apps, social media, and all unnecessary distractions. Allow God to speak to you in the silence.
- Read and meditate on Psalm 139 (bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/139). Reflect on God's particular and perfect love for you. Consider the incomprehensible dignity of every human life and how God is calling you to protect it.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: Jesus calls us to follow Him and live according to His teachings in every aspect of our lives, including our civic engagement. We must support life not only in our hearts, but also through our actions. Learn more about important considerations for Catholics in "Priorities at the Polls" (respectlife.org/priorities-at-the-polls).

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Day 3

**If you or someone you know is suffering from participation in abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. Visit hopeafterabortion.org.*

Intercession: May all who suffer after participation in abortion find healing in Christ's unending mercy.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: From the beginning of creation, throughout Scripture, and most perfectly in the life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, God has revealed Himself as love itself. In His infinite love for us, God desires nothing more than to forgive our sins and offer us His mercy. Many sadly believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin," but God desires to forgive *every* sin, including the sin of abortion.

No sin is unforgivable, and no sinner is beyond redemption. We have all failed and we are all in need of God's mercy. It is for this very reason that Christ suffered, died, and rose again. Christ came to offer us His infinite love and mercy, and we can receive it in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Throughout salvation history, God has welcomed repentant sinners with special joy. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus assures us that, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance" (Lk 15:7).

Jesus never rejects a humble and contrite heart. With confidence, let us run into the outstretched arms of Christ's mercy.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Abstain from your usual coffee or tea today.
- Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for today's intention (uscgb.org/divine-mercy-chaplet).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 4 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Many suffer for years in silence, yet Christ desires nothing more than to offer them the fullness of His forgiveness and healing. Learn how you can share a message of hope and mercy with those who have been wounded by abortion in "Bridges of Mercy for Healing After Abortion" (uscgb.org/bridges-of-mercy).

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Day 4

Intercession: May pregnant and parenting moms find life-affirming help for themselves and their children through the Christian community.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: In the Gospel account of the Visitation, Mary travels to the hill country "in haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:39). Despite being unexpectedly pregnant herself, Mary responds to the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy with *urgency*, embarking on a journey that was probably difficult and spending the next three months at Elizabeth's side.

Mary's example invites us to become more aware of the needs of pregnant and parenting moms in our own communities. A woman with an unexpected pregnancy may have any number of fears and challenges: facing judgment from her friends and family, losing her job or housing, or being abandoned by the father of her child. The needs and challenges of single mothers can be immense, especially for women in poverty, and resources are often not apparent for those most in need of support. Mothers in difficult circumstances should see the Church as a place where they can turn for friendship, help, and support. Mary's witness is an invitation to each of us to step up in love and compassion. It is a summons to *make haste* to help mothers who may be isolated and alone. We too can bear Christ within us and help others experience His presence. May we, the body of Christ, do all we can to provide mothers, children, and families with the support they need to flourish.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Fast from television and social media today. Spend some time praying and reflecting on how God may be asking you to help build a culture of life in your home, workplace, or Church community.
- Offer this short "Prayer for Pregnant Mothers" for today's intention. (This prayer is also available at walkingwithmoms.com/prayer-for-pregnant-mothers.)

O Blessed Mother, you received the good news of the incarnation of Christ, your Son, with faith and trust. Grant your protection to all pregnant mothers facing difficulties.

Guide us as we strive to make our parish communities places of welcome and assistance for mothers

in need. Help us become instruments of God's love and compassion.

Mary, Mother of the Church, graciously help us build a culture of life and a civilization of love, together with all people of good will, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life. Amen.

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our communities, often alone without a network of support. As Catholics, we are called to lovingly support mothers in welcoming and caring for their children. Moms in need should see the Catholic Church as a place they can come for compassionate assistance and accompaniment on the journey of motherhood. Visit www.WalkingWithMoms.com to learn more about the Church's efforts to increase support for mothers and their children through *Walking with Moms in Need*—and how *your* parish can participate.

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Day 5

Intercession: May all people with disabilities be treated with respect and their lives protected.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection:

We live in a culture that idolizes productivity, efficiency, and independence, often measuring a person by what he or she can *do*. These and other false standards are used to determine whether someone's life is considered worth living. But God's love—individual, real, unchanging—is the true source of our dignity. Because His love will never change, nothing can reduce our God-given dignity, and nothing can diminish the immeasurable worth of our lives.

The Gospels recount that Jesus constantly drew close to those who were ill or had a disability. He calls us to care for others, especially those who are in need—material or otherwise—and reminds us, “Whatever you did for one of these... you did for me” (Mt 25:40). Looking through the eyes of His love, we can see “in every person his living image” (*Evangelium Vitae* 83). Every person is a *wonder* of God's creation, reflects God Himself, and has been created for eternal life with Him. Every person, every life is a gift. Let us bear witness to this truth in our words and actions.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Mediate on today's Mass readings.
- Offer “A Prayer for Life” for today's intention (bit.ly/a-prayer-for-life).

Father and maker of all, you adorn all creation with splendor and

beauty, and fashion human lives in your image and likeness.

*Awaken in every heart reverence for
the work of your hands, and renew
among your people a readiness to
nurture and sustain your precious
gift of life.*

*Grant this through our Lord
Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever. Amen.*

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: In a culture that so often judges our worth based on what we can do, produce, or achieve, the beauty of a life lived with disabilities can be difficult to understand. Yet, God assures us that every human life is a precious gift, filled with inherent value, dignity, and worth. A mother of a child with Down syndrome shares her personal experience of witnessing the beauty of life in all circumstances in, “A Perfect Gift” (respectlife.org/a-perfect-gift).

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Day 6

Intercession: May all who are ill or nearing death receive care that meets all their needs and upholds the gift of their lives.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: When faced with serious illness, some people, in desperation, tragically seek to end their lives through assisted suicide. But they typically don't want to die. Their pursuit of assisted suicide is usually rooted in fears of helplessness, pain, or dependency. They may fear being perceived as a “burden” by their family. The patient requesting assisted suicide is often asking, “Does anyone want me to be alive, or care enough to talk me out of this request and support me through this difficult time?” Assisted suicide offers only false compassion and a misguided sense of mercy. Rather than addressing the patients' problems, assisted suicide cruelly eliminates the life of a patient in need of authentic care.

Instead, people who are ill or dying should receive care that meets their needs and upholds the gift of their lives. Palliative care (which is not limited to the dying process) and hospice care embody a comprehensive and integrated approach that seeks to provide physical, psychological, social, familial, and spiritual support for those who are sick or dying. We need to surround those going through serious illness or the dying process with love, support, and companionship that are “anchored in unconditional respect for their human dignity, beginning with respect for the inherent value of their lives.”* Every life is worth living.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Look for ways to incorporate small acts of service throughout your day: let someone go ahead of you in line, complete a chore for a family member, exercise patience while in traffic, text a friend to let them know you are praying for their intentions, or take time to ask how a coworker is doing and listen attentively.
- Pray “Every Life is Worth Living” (usccb.org/every-life-worth-living) for all who are sick, suffering, or near death.

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: In 2020, the Vatican released the letter *Samaritanus bonus*, “on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life.” The letter reaffirms the Church’s teaching on care for those who are critically ill or dying and offers additional guidance for increasingly complex situations at the end of life. Learn more about how we are called to care for those who are seriously ill or nearing death in “The Witness of the Good Samaritan: Palliative Care and Hospice” (<https://bit.ly/witness-good-samaritan>).

*Excerpt from *To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.

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Day 7

Intercession: May healthcare always respect God’s design and protect His gift of human life.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: Jesus’ care for those who were sick provided a model for all healthcare to follow. His healing mission wasn’t limited to physical afflictions. Rather, He reached “people at the deepest level of their existence,”¹ healing them in mind, body, and soul, calling them to new life in Him.

Healthcare professionals have been entrusted with “a special vocation to share in carrying forth God’s life-giving and healing work.”² The care they give must be in keeping with the well-being of the person in mind, body, and spirit³ and always have as its goal the protection of human life—never its destruction.

Yet in an age of rapid scientific and technological developments, as well as profound social change, this is not always the case. There are many instances in healthcare settings in which God’s design for the human person is violated. Abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, IVF, and contraception are just some examples among many. Authentic healthcare must always have as its goal the service and care of human life, and never its destruction.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Sacrifice snacking today. Enjoy three small, simple meals but refrain from eating in between.
- Offer this “Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe” (usccb.org/prayers/prayer-our-lady-guadalupe) for today’s intention.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: When married couples have difficulty conceiving a child and turn to healthcare providers, they might be offered options that are not in keeping with Catholic teaching, like *in vitro* fertilization. Why do some reproductive technologies pose serious moral problems, while others respect God’s design and protect human life? Learn more in “Seven Considerations While Navigating Infertility” (usccb.org/navigating-infertility). Additional reading: “Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology” (bit.ly/life-giving-love).

1 *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, Sixth Edition*, p 6.

2 *Ibid*, p 7.

3 *Ibid*, p 13.

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Day 8

Intercession: May our nation end its use of the death penalty, bearing witness to the dignity of every human life.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: As Catholics, we believe and put our hope in a merciful and loving God, conscious of our own brokenness and need for redemption. Our Lord calls us to imitate Him by witnessing to the inherent dignity of every person, including those whose actions have been despicable. Our hope lies in the mercy of God who says to us, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Mt 5:7) and “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13).

In the story of Cain and Abel, God refuses to take Cain’s life as punishment for killing his brother. But God’s justice requires that Cain live the rest of his earthly life as a wanderer. Through this account, we are reminded that “not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God Himself pledges to guarantee this. And it is precisely here that the paradoxical mystery of the merciful justice of God is shown forth” (*Evangelium vitae* 9).

As the culture of death threatens to select who does and who does not deserve life, we must uphold that *all* human life has invaluable dignity and worth. As Christians, we are called to witness to the Gospel of life, hope, and mercy.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Embrace silence today. Refrain from listening to music or podcasts during mundane moments of your day like commuting, cooking, or cleaning. Instead, turn your attention to God’s voice without noise or distractions.
- Pray the Angelus today ([usccb.org/angelus](https://www.usccb.org/angelus))—on awakening, at noon, or at 6 p.m. (or all three times).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: For people committed to upholding the sanctity of human life, the need to respect and protect innocent human life is apparent. For some, however, issues like the death penalty may seem less clear. Find answers to common questions about the death penalty from a Catholic perspective in, “Death Penalty: Catholic Q&A” ([usccb.org/death-penalty-q-and-a](https://www.usccb.org/death-penalty-q-and-a)).

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Day 9

Intercession: May all Catholics help build a culture that cherishes every person as a precious gift from God.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: Human life is under attack in countless ways in our culture today. In the face of so many threats to life, we may become discouraged and wonder how we can make a difference. As Christians, we depend not on our own strength, but on God and His Spirit moving within us.

Changing the culture is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts. We are called to draw close to Jesus, willing to be instructed in His truth and transformed by His love. When we encounter Christ, experience His love, and deepen our relationship with Him in prayer and the sacraments, we come to a greater understanding of our own worth and that of others.

As we become more united with Jesus, it becomes easier to perceive how He is guiding us. God has given each of us particular gifts, and with those gifts He entrusts us with a role and duty within the Body of Christ.

There are many ways that we can help to build a culture that cherishes the gift of human life, including service, advocacy, education, and civic engagement, for example. With prayer as our essential foundation, may God guide each of us in how we are uniquely called to contribute to a culture of life.

Acts of Reparation (*Choose one.*)

- Abstain from meat today.
- Offer the “Prayer to St. Joseph, Defender of Life” for today’s intention (respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: Prayer changes us. Spending time with Jesus transforms our hearts and opens us to receive the fullness of God’s grace. Inspired by God’s love, we are called to put our love into action. Reflect more deeply on how you can help build a culture of life in, “Radical Solidarity” (respectlife.org/radical-solidarity-reflection).

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