

— Homily —  
Mass of the Resurrection  
for  
Audrey Santo  
(Little Audrey)

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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Let me begin by quoting a reflection penned by Cardinal John Henry Newman over 150 years ago:

*God has Created me  
to do some definite service.  
God has committed some work to me  
which has not been committed to another.  
I have my mission.  
I may never know it in this life  
but I shall be told it in the next.  
I am a link in a chain,  
a bond of connection between persons.  
God has not created me for naught.  
I shall do good—I shall do God's work.  
I shall be an angel of peace,  
a preacher of truth in my own place  
while not intending it,  
if I do but keep the commandments.  
Therefore I will trust God.*

*Whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.  
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve God,  
in perplexity, my perplexity may serve God,  
if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve God.  
God does nothing in vain.  
God knows what God is about.*

On the Friday night of the week that Audrey returned home from the hospital after her accident in 1987, I went to the Santo's home, unasked and unannounced, to pray for Audrey with the family. There I met for the first time Audrey, Linda, Matthew, Gigi and Stevie. Linda's mother was there also, along with Sr. Joan. But, that was it. In those long ago days there were no national or international television cameras around, no journalists from all four corners the globe present, no books about Audrey in a variety of languages on the table. There was only Linda and four young children: Matthew, Gigi, and Stevie standing around the bed of their sister, Audrey, praying the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

Twenty years later on April 14, 2007 in the same house on the same street during the pre-dawn night, there still were Linda, Matthew, Gigi, and Stevie standing around the bed of their sister, Audrey, praying the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Again, no TV cameras, no reporters, just a little family suffering terribly as the world slept, because one of them was about to physically depart from them for the rest of time.

These two snapshots of moments twenty years apart are like bookends that hold together the entire story of Audrey. Were a person to have God's perspective on existence and be able to look across the panorama of Audrey's life from the day of her accident at 11:03 a.m. on August 9, 1987 to the day of her death at 3:58 a.m. on April 14, 2007, ninety-nine percent of what would be observed would be Linda, Matthew, Gigi and Stevie arranging and re-arranging their lives as best they could—or having their external or internal lives arranged or re-arranged for them by happenings beyond their control—in order to care for their sister, Audrey.

Two decades is a long time to care for someone who is totally dependent on you all day every day, all night every night. It is an especially long time for youngsters growing up. But, for two decades Linda, Matthew, Gigi and Stevie laid down piece after piece of their lives so that the one who was so very precious to them could have life. I do not in the slightest intend to suggest that this was done in the begrudging and resentful spirit of duty or obligation. It most definitely was not. It was done in the spirit of love, the spirit of that Christ-like love that exists within every human being who comes into existence by the Word (Logos) of God. It was done in a freely chosen spirit of self-sacrificing care that is well captured by the logo created by the Catholic priest, Edward Flanagan, for Boys Town in the 1917. The logo was the picture of one young child carrying another and saying, "He's not heavy, he's my brother." Love—the love that Jesus Christ the Word of God places in every human being, the love that is made gloriously visible on His cross of nonviolent unconditional compassion for all, the love that is validated by the Resurrection of Jesus

as being the Way, the Truth and the Life of God—is what the entire "Audrey story" is an embodiment of and a witness to.

Let us be clear and let us be candid. For a very large percentage of people in this society and around the world, perhaps the majority, a person like Audrey doesn't count. For them she is at the bottom of the list of what the world values. She is first of all a child. The world, despite its self-serving and self-aggrandizing propaganda to the contrary, presents an incontestable historical and contemporary record of having little authentic regard for the lives of children. One person dies of starvation on this planet every nine seconds—on a planet where 4.2 pounds and 3,500 calories of food per person per day is produced. A hideous 70% of the starvation-induced deaths are children. By far the largest single sociological unit of people destroyed in every modern war are not soldiers or arms dealers or politicians but children. The examples of the low value the world places upon children are legion, right down to the legal and systemic destruction of them by the troika of evil that Pope John Paul II designates as "savage capitalism," "totalitarian communism" and the "abomination of abortion." In the eyes of what Jesus in the Gospels calls "the world" and what the politicians, militarists and commercial moguls call *realpolitik*, children have no intrinsic value that must always and everywhere be respected. Left to the world of *realpolitik*, Audrey, like hundreds of millions of other helpless children—in utero and extra utero—in 1987, would have had her life snuffed out before the ball fell in Times Square to begin 1988. But, Audrey was not left to the world of *realpolitik*. She was taken into the embrace of Linda, Matthew, Gigi and Stevie.

However, Audrey was not only a child, she was a severely handicapped child. In the world's value system she counted for less than nothing. She was a drain on resources that could be utilized to increase profits. Like the children sent to the gas chambers of Auschwitz because they had no production value for the I.G. Farben Company, Audrey because of her severe handicap had no value from the world's perspective. She could never be counted on to do anything that

counted by “the world’s” standards, and therefore she didn’t count in the world’s scheme of things.

But in the eyes and hearts and minds of Linda, Matthew, Gigi, and Stevie—and God, Audrey not only counts, she is of infinite value. Why is Audrey of infinite value to Linda, Matthew, Gigi, Stevie and God, and of no value to the best and the brightest practitioners of the world’s “realpolitik?” Why? The answer is self evident: love. The first group of people love her and the second group see her as expendable collateral damage in their pursuit of some goal(s) they have. But, by what right—other than the raw, brutal power to do it—does a person discount to worthlessness a human being that another loves? By what right does one person say to another: “Those I love count but those you love don’t count. Those I love must be protected but those you love can be left in harm’s way or put in harms way. Those I love are irreplaceable but those you love can be disposed of if they are an impediment to advancing my agenda. Those I love must be nursed and treated when they are in pain but those you love can be left to suffer in relievable pain—or worse can have pain visited upon them if my agenda requires it.” By what right—other than the power to do it—does a person devalue the life of another human being?

Suppose, it is only God who loves and values a person? By what standard of religious or secular morality would a person devalue and refuse to love someone that the Source of Existence loves and values? I would like to suggest that above all else Audrey’s life and the circumstances surrounding it place before the world the central problem that is bedeviling it and the only solution to that problem that can result in anything other than the continuing ceaselessly mutual destruction of people by people. The primeval question Audrey embodies for all humanity to see, to ponder, to confront and to resolve—regardless of creed or culture, regardless of race or religion, regardless of class or nationality—is “Who counts?”

Does the human life in a womb count? Does the child in Nagasaki on August 9, 1945 count? Do the hundred of thousands of children destroyed by an

embargo of a country count? Do those whose suffering could be prevented or relieved but who are left in misery count? Do those who are not like me count? Or, do only those who have money, political power, connections in high places or cultural status count? Do only those who the media says count, count? Is a person only as good as his money? Or her ethnicity? Or his religion? Or her race? Or his sex? Or her politics?

Who counts? Are the lives of some people worth more than the lives of other people? Is the life of someone who stands in the way of a Mafia boss getting what he wants of less value than the mob boss’s life simply because the mob boss has the power to inflict pain on him or her and kill him or her? Do those who have luxury wealth count more than those who do not have enough to sustain life? The great problems that have turned the human condition into a furnace of agony—racism, militarism, classism, religionism, sexism, ethnism, nationalism—all have at their operational foundation **the belief that some people count more than others, that some people are worth more than others.**

This is the universally momentous, pressing and unavoidable spiritual, philosophical, psychological, political and economic crisis that Audrey quintessentially exposes for the contemporary world to see in the flesh, after her accident on August 9, 1987: She is at the very bottom of just about every value system that “the world” of realpolitik has to offer—even though for Linda, Matthew, Gigi, Stevie and God, she is of infinite value.

Let me attempt to formulate in a mere three sentences, taken from the writings of three different authors, the issue Audrey concretely and acutely places before the world and on which humanity’s future rides. First, Dr. Peter Singer, a Princeton University philosopher of some standing writes, “We are intimidated into uncritically accepting that all human life has some special dignity or worth...Hardly anyone believes that all human life is of equal worth. ...In regarding a newborn infant as not having the same right to life as a person, the cultures that practiced

infanticide were on solid ground.” Second, St. Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, writes, “There is one God who is the Father of all” (GAL 4:6). Third, the poet Annie Dillard writes, “Either Life is always and in all circumstances sacred, or intrinsically of no account; it is inconceivable that it should be in some cases the one, and in some the other!”

There you have it. Audrey represents for the world an inescapable “either-or” choice. Either she, and therefore all other people, regardless of their qualities and abilities or lack thereof, are infinitely loved and valued by God and therefore possess an irradicable, infinite, intrinsic value, or she, and all, are “intrinsically of no account.” If the latter is the case her—and everyone else’s—worth is established by whether they fit well or poorly into someone’s concoction of conjectures about how things should be done. If she is a good fit, she counts. If she is a poor fit or does not fit, she is of little or no value. She doesn’t count! If the former is the case, then no person is worth more than Audrey nor is any person worth less. Her life and each and every human life then counts in the eyes, mind and heart of the one “Father of all”—and what God values and loves no person has the right to de-value and destroy. Audrey is a prophetic statement in the flesh of the crisis that humanity faces as its capacity to do evil, as well as good, increases daily via technology. For as humanity decides the value of the “least,” and thereby decides on the empathy, attention, care and concern that will be afforded the “least,” it simultaneously decides the atmosphere and quality of its own temporal and eternal future.

The Greek work “krisis” means judgment. Audrey is among “the least” by the world’s standards of who and what is valuable. As something like a scapegoat-person, as something like a stand-in for all “the least” who do not count, Audrey presents to the world in the flesh the precise choice it must make between good and evil, and on which so much of the future of human life and humanity’s destiny depend. She is for the world the silent spokesperson for what Jesus explicitly teaches is the standard of judgement for “all people” at the end of time, and hence the standard for decision-making and behavior for “all peo-

ple” during time, namely, active mercy toward those who don’t count, as opposed to passive indifference and mercilessness toward the “least” (MT 25:31-46). She speaks without a word the prophetic and salvific Word that reaches to the ends of the earth: “Choose in your thoughts, in your words, in your deeds and in your institutional arrangements either Jesus of Nazareth or Singer of Princeton. Choose either the Way where God is the ‘Father of all’ who loves each of His sons and daughters with the depth and intensity of the prodigal Father in Jesus’ famous parable (LK 15:11-32); or else choose the way where human beings are nothing more than very complex things whose worth, and hence care, is relative to someone’s evaluation of their utility in the promotion of some end. Making the choice cannot be escaped. The decision moment is here. What say you? What do you?”

I speak not in metaphor nor in hyperbole when I say that this silent, meek, sufferer who never “raised her voice” speaks to the world. By not the slightest effort of her own, after twenty years of silent suffering, she is known throughout the world by tens, if not hundreds of millions of people. How this has happened has been baffling to observe. But, to the world her witness (in Greek the word witness is “martyr”) and the witness of Linda, Matthew, Gigi, and Stevie do speak. God has spoken His Word of truth, judgement, love and reconciliation through Audrey to seven continents—to the world.

As I began by quoting a reflection from another, let me conclude with what I believe is an excellent encapsulation of the mystery of Audrey, which was penned by a Jesuit priest, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, in his spiritual classic, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, about three hundred years ago:

*“God has a plan for each soul and carries it out very successfully, though it is well disguised. Under the name of “disguise” are such things a misfortune, illness, and spiritual weakness. But in the hands of God everything flourishes and ultimately turns to good. God arranges the accomplishment of his highest designs by means which deeply offend our normal feelings.”*

But, God is our Father. God is love. God who is love became flesh in Jesus, and “nothing can separate us from that love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (RM 8:31-38). His designs for the salvation of all humanity must be accomplished—even if “disguises” are necessary. However, God knows what He is about. He also knows what love is about—both divine and human! So, I say to you, Linda, Matthew, Gigi and Stevie, live now in the certain and joyful hope, that as was the case for the sorrowing Mary

Magdalen who heard her name spoken to her at the empty tomb by the One she loved and who loved her, the moment shall arrive when you too will hear your name spoken by the God who is love, Jesus. And, in that moment, you will also hear again Audrey, full of life and love, call you by your very own name: “Mommy,” “Matthew,” “Gigi,” “Stevie!” This is the Good News of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ! Alleluia! Amen.