

In today's Gospel Jesus asks the disciples a simple question: 'Have you understood all this?' and their reply is a surprisingly confident 'Yes'. The disciples' response is surprising because Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom is strangely paradoxical.

Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, like a pearl we find. It is something we stumble across. The life of the Kingdom is a gift. Jesus says 'It has pleased the Father to give you the Kingdom' So the Kingdom is a gift yet it is also something that must be bought. 'He goes and sells everything he owns and buys it' The Kingdom is a gift and yet it will cost us everything.

Each year we keep this Sunday as a 'Day for Life' when we are called to reflect on the gift of life. The gift of life is freely bestowed on us and yet it is a gift that must be accepted and which we must work to protect.

In our culture there seems to be a growing carelessness about the sanctity of life. Those who are the most vulnerable and those who need the most care seem to be the ones who are most easily discarded, whose human dignity is quickly forgotten.

It would be easy to settle for a weary cynicism that thinks that there is little difference that we can make or to make the even bigger mistake of giving in to the secular viewpoint that the message of Christ has little to offer.

But we believe that the Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of Life and is the truth not just for those who believe but is the truth for everyone and the basis for a just and fair society. We are called to a fresh confidence in the Gospel.

The message of the Bishops for this year's Day for Life focuses on the involvement of young people in the protection of life from the beginning of life to its natural end.

Young people need to be included not only because of what the Church can offer them but because of what they can contribute. In his rule for monasteries St Benedict reminds us that when we make decisions we should listen to everyone because God often 'reveals his will to the youngest'.

Young people often have a freshness, an idealism, a sense of possibility, that is necessary for the whole Church.

Not only does the Church have a message for young people but, perhaps, has much to gain from the enthusiasm and the open hearts of the young.

In a recent speech Pope Francis said that: 'God continues to render his Church young and beautiful'. It is by the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Church is rendered young and beautiful but it is the job of each of us to understand the beauty of the Gospel. The originality of the Christian insight into the meaning of life is the pearl of great price that the world is thirsting for. We are called to see anew the immense dignity that God has given each individual, made in his image and likeness.

The Bishops' message for this day reminds us: 'Every one of us, young and old alike can play our part in the promotion of life. Our every thought, word or action can promote or extinguish life, we all have a valuable contribution to make'.

The question Christ asks the disciples he addresses to each of us, 'do you understand all this?'

Jesus teaches us the rich message of the Gospel of life and invites us to live it with hope and enthusiasm.