



## We need truth to gain respect for dignity of all life

*The September 27 funeral of Gloria Strauss, the young girl whose family and friends prayed for a miracle during her long, painful battle with cancer, revealed the richness of the truth we proclaim in Jesus Christ. As we mourned her death, those of us whose faith and hope are rooted in the resurrection also celebrated her life.*

The apparent contradiction in our joyful sorrow is an expression of faith that embarrasses and confounds the world in which we live. For us, Gloria's journey provided a lesson in what it means to be truly human and deepened our understanding and appreciation for the life, death and resurrection of our Lord.

As I said in my letter to her family and friends at the funeral: "I realize you all prayed for a miracle, be that a miraculous healing or the miracle of heaven. I want you to know that I believe I have already seen that first miracle. It is in all of you. You, the parents, you the brothers and sisters, you the family and friends... are God's first miracle flowing from Gloria's witness to faith."

### **Modern miracles**

We live in an age and time when it is reasonable to hope for miracles, and yet for so much of humanity it has become an era devoid of hope and deformed by cynicism. Miracles of modern science and technology routinely enhance, extend and save lives in ways that would have been impossible in previous periods.

These modern advances in our knowledge, however, have not been accompanied by a commensurate advance in our culture's grasp of truth, and the growing gulf between scientific knowledge and our understanding of life is leading us to a culture of death.

Even as the miraculous potential of stem cell therapies promise previously impossible healings, this medical advance is being deformed because many in our culture refuse to acknowledge the truth about life before birth. Similarly, those who propose assisted suicide as "death with dignity" cynically reject the dignity of life by redefining it because of age or illness.

Many such gaps between knowledge and truth exist in our postmodern culture. While sufficient wealth exists to alleviate hunger and suffering, millions of our brothers and sisters endure poverty and preventable illness. While America remains a beacon of liberty that beckons those in search of a better life, we are failing as a nation to create effective pathways that grant freedom, hope and dignity to immigrants. And despite the fact that no legitimate rationale remains for executions, we continue to perpetuate the criminal penalty of death.

**'We need truth'**

October is Respect Life Month, a time set aside by the bishops of the United States since 1972 for reflection and prayer. It is a time intended to renew and strengthen our resolve to bring about a culture of life. As we celebrate this tradition in the church we need to remind ourselves of the relationship between knowledge and truth.

This is the monumental challenge of our time. As Pope Benedict XVI said in his homily at Marianzell, Austria on Sept. 8: "If truth does not exist for man, then neither can he ultimately distinguish between good and evil. And then the great and wonderful discoveries of science become double-edged: they can open up significant possibilities for good, for the benefit of mankind, but also, as we see only too clearly, they can pose a terrible threat, involving the destruction of man and the world. We need truth."

As we in the Archdiocese of Seattle pray and reflect during the month of October, we are blessed by our memory of the life and death of Gloria Strauss. Although her life was short, she lived long enough to gain a profound wisdom. Gloria understood that life was a great gift and despite her suffering she never failed to express her gratitude for that gift.

Gloria did not live long enough to gain great knowledge, but through her faith she came to appropriate the truth. It is the truth we profess as sisters and brothers of the risen Lord. This is the truth we need. It is the truth about which the Holy Father preached. And it is the truth for which each of us should pray during this month dedicated to respect for the sacredness and dignity of all life.