



## ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

October 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last month, I received a letter from Archbishop Donald Wuerl, the Archbishop of Washington, D.C., informing me of the introduction of the cause of canonization of Mary Virginia Merrick. Miss Mary, as she was known, grew up in a family of great wealth and privilege. At the age of twelve, she fell while playing outdoors and was paralyzed from the waist down. From that point onward, she used a wheelchair to get around; her mobility was limited to the use of only her hands and arms. Nonetheless, Miss Mary continued to attend school and would accompany her mother when she went to deliver food to the poor. Several years later, Miss Mary established The Christ Child Society, an organization dedicated to helping needy children. Reading the story of her life was a moving experience for me. In the midst of so many physical hardships, her response to the Lord was truly exemplary. Because of my own physical disabilities, I was touched by her life and the spirituality she developed.

During the month of October, our parishes observe both Respect Life Month and Inclusion Awareness Sunday. Both are critically important because of the “culture of death” so present in society... one in which human life is disposable and the unique dignity of each person disregarded. Mary Virginia Merrick’s life is a beautiful example of how people of all abilities have gifts to bring to the Church and society; God uses every one of us to build up the Body of Christ.

I invite each one of you, as individuals and as members of your parish community, to reflect today on the ways in which you can make people of differing abilities feel welcomed and appreciated. Providing everyone with opportunities to participate in worship and in service is a demonstration of our own open hearts and reminds us all about how much we can grow and learn when everyone is included in parish life.

May God bless all of you and your families. Each day, I remember you and your intentions before the Lord and I ask that you remember me in your own prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.  
Archbishop of Chicago