

The Right to Life of the Unborn

40 Days of Prayer to restore

Keynote Address

We gather in the darkness of night, but we are not children of the dark! No, we are sons and daughters of the day...of the Light. Yet many of our brothers and sisters remain in the dark...in regard to the truth of the value of all human life, from conception to natural death!

Two thousand years ago, the valley from Tyre and Sidon in the West, to the Sea of Galilee in the East, and down the Jordan valley south to the Dead Sea was known as the 'Valley of Darkness'. The people of this valley could be characterized by St. Paul's description of the "*works of the flesh*" that produce behavior that is at odds with the life of the Spirit that we have received in Baptism. The people who lived there were characterized by "*immorality, impurity, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts and orgies.*" (Galatians 5:19-21)

It was in and near this Valley of Darkness that Christ, The Light of the World, was born, lived and ultimately suffered, died and rose from the dead so that humanity might have the "fullness of life". At the Christmas Liturgy of Midnight we read from the Prophet Isaiah.

*"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom,
a light has shown."* (Isaiah 9:1)

We gather in the dark...not in the dark of night...rather in the darkness of CONFUSION...of Truth...of Values. HOWEVER, we are not in darkness, my friends. No, we are children of the Light. We radiate the Light of Christ that is within us. We proclaim the Truth that all human life is sacred, from conception to natural death. From our Christian Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures we hold so dear, we truly believe what Jesus proclaimed in John's Gospel.

*"If you remain in my Word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will
know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31-32)

We do believe and we do proclaim that all human life is sacred. We firmly declare that the most vulnerable of human life, the unborn child in the womb is especially sacred. We have taken up and we will continue to defend the unborn so that they, too, will have the opportunity to experience life in this world and to develop their God given talents to help make this a better world.

The Supreme Court decision of 1973 in Roe vs. Wade cast the culture of the United States into a profound darkness. We will not allow that darkness to prevail! Light will conquer. In that decision and since then, the truth of human life has been disfigured.

In the beginning of the Respect-Life Movement the argument was, “*Is the unborn child in the womb a person?*” The unborn child was deprived of personhood, much like African slaves were deprived of personhood in the 1800’s of our history. But St. Thomas Aquinas in the 12th Century stated:

“The human is a person when there is an intrinsic principle of animation present within his being.”

Without knowing all the present truths of modern genetics, it appears he was quite correct. When conception occurs through the combining of half from the father and half from the mother, the genetic helix is formed. This DNA begins to direct the formation and development of the human being for its entire life. Hence, from the moment of conception there is the “*intrinsic principle of animation*” which St. Thomas said was necessary for personhood!

Recently the law has afforded protection to the unborn child only in the instances where someone tried to harm the mother, which led to the death of the unborn child. But as long as the unborn child remained in the womb...no protection is given.

In an article by Jonathan Gurwitz that was syndicated in the press on January 30, 2005, entitled *As ‘fetuses’ come into focus, abortion supporters lose their edge*, the author writes:

“Ultrasound is peeling back the curtain on the unrevealed child in utero. Or, as some people will choose to refer to it, a fetus. Medical technology, at the same time, is rendering obsolete much of the language of the abortion debate.

How does one know if an unborn child is a baby or a fetus? The question was highlighted by a gruesome crime that took place in December, 2004, in Missouri. Authorities charged Lisa Montgomery with strangling Bobbie Jo Stinnett, who was eight months pregnant. Montgomery, however, did more. According to one Associated Press report, she was also accused of “cutting out the fetus and taking the baby.”

Ponder that feat of linguistic gymnastics. Was Stinnett pregnant with one child---the fetus---and Montgomery took another child---the baby? Or was there only one child involved and some transformative event occurred in the instant between being cut out and taken? Of course not!...the child was as much a baby before she was cut from her mother’s womb as after.”

Gurwitz then adds a tremendous statement. He says:

“A child ripped from its mother’s womb at eight months cannot be a victim while the same child crushed in a surgical procedure is not.

The act of being “wanted” does not confer life.”

We live in a Western Culture that prizes CHOICE. We often see or hear advertising for burgers or other ‘fast foods’ like, “Have it your way”, or “Just the way you like it” or “Choose your own combination meal” “Choice” is tossed around as if one, could do what one wanted, whenever one wanted without any concern for the effect on another person.

In this day and age of “My Right”...“My Choice” our society does not allow the unborn to have the “RIGHT” to Choose! It does not even let the Father of the child have the “Right to Choose”. It is as if one’s personal, subjective choice dictates what is “right” or “wrong”. This is NOT a Truth of any sort. Without objective moral standards and values, there is no TRUTH and hence, there is ultimately NO FREEDOM! In our culture, is Freedom only for a few?

With this unbridled concept of ‘rugged individualism’ and ‘exaggerated’ sense of ‘my right’ in isolation from any responsibility, we forget who we are and what our destiny is! We forget that we were created in the “*image and likeness of God.*” We forget that our being COMES from God, EXISTS in God and is FOR God!

Our culture has forgotten the TRUTH of which Psalm 63 speaks.

*“O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and
my soul thirsts
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.”*

Or,

*“Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul (being)
longs for you, O Lord, My God.”*

This important truth has been forgotten by this culture that we live it. Pope John Paul II said it so clearly in Mane Nobiscum Domine.

*“Our secularized culture is characterized by a forgetfulness of God and a
vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency.”*

One might also add, GREED!

Today, the issue is “*when does human life begin?*” It seems pretty clear to me. Human life begins at Conception, when the two halves of the chromosomes donated by the father and mother come together to form the new DNA Helix. This question, “*when does human life begin?*” appears to be nothing more than a subterfuge to confuse and cloud the issue. This only helps to keep people in the dark and surely offers no Truth to clarify things and to offer women the only true freedom that exists.

On Sunday, August 24, 2008, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi appeared on "Meet the Press". When asked by Mr. Tom Brokaw, "*When does life begin?*" She responded: "*We don't know. The point is that it shouldn't have an impact on the woman's right to choose.*" Later she added, "*I don't think anyone can tell you when life begins.*" Mr. Brokaw that said, "*The Catholic Church at the moment feels very strongly that it begins at the point of conception.*" Then Speaker Pelosi added, "*I understand. And this is maybe fifty years or something like that.*"

Again the viewers were kept in the dark...or are led into a deeper darkness by both of these speakers statements. We do know when Life begins! We also know a woman's CHOICE over the life of her baby is WRONG!

For twenty centuries, not for fifty years, the Catholic Church has taught that abortion is grievously sinful. Yes, some theologians have speculated, from time to time as to the actual beginning of human life, but the Church has consistently taught that abortion is WRONG! Another point to keep in mind is that all of Christianity was united, until the latter part of the last century, in the teaching that abortion is wrong.

We are not the "Religious Right", as if that were something derogatory! We are ordinary, main stream, Christians, (Muslims and Jews are also Pro Life). We are faithful to our Religious Traditions.

St. Paul, when he lists the works of the flesh that are inconsistent with the Life of the Spirit, names the following as sinful actions to be avoided by Christian.

"Immorality, impurity, idolatry, sorcery, acts of selfishness, envy, orgies and the like." (Galatians 5:19-21)

The Greek word that St. Paul used, that we translate as sorcery or potions, is *farmakia*. Today we get medicine or drugs from this word. However, what is striking is that one of the usages in the 1st century of Christianity when Paul was writing Galatians is "potions used to expel the fruit of the womb." (Note 1) Noonan, in Contraception, writes "The term 'medicine' in respect to children designates abortifacients." (John T. Noonan, Contraception, Cambridge, MA, p.25) This Letter to the Galatians was written about 54 or 55ad. Most of these Christians were converts from paganism who often practiced abortions before their conversions.

Another very early text, The Didache, written about the end of the 1st Century or the beginning of the 2nd Century of Christianity, in speaking of the Second Commandment, to love neighbor as self, the author states the 'gross sins' that are prohibited. Abortion is mentioned explicitly.

"And the second commandment of the Teaching; 2 You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:13-14), you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal (Exodus 20:15), you shall

not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten.” (Didache, Chapter II)

The comment by Mr. Brokaw is particularly bothersome... “*The Catholic Church at the moment feels very strongly that it begins at the point of conception.*”

First of all, it is not only “*at this moment*” but the Church has consistently taught for 20 centuries that Abortion is a grievous sin. (Note 2)

Secondly, the Church does not “Feel”, it Teaches, as a truth, that the taking of all life, but especially that of the unborn, is grievously wrong.

Authentic moral teaching is based on objective truth, not on popular opinion! I would like to remind you of historic fact from our own history in the USA in regard to slavery.

“In 1861, as the Civil War began, a majority of the residents of Massachusetts opposed slavery, a majority of the residents of South Carolina approved of slavery, and in Missouri people were sharply divided on the issue. Does that mean that, in 1861, slavery was immoral in Massachusetts, moral in South Carolina and something of a moral ‘wash’ in Missouri.”

“Sound moral teaching demands much more good sense than that.” (George Niederauer, Archbishop of San Francisco, Statement, Sept. 5, 2008)

I would like to return to a thought I shared earlier. Pro-Life People or Respect Life People are Pro Choice People, but in a very different sense. I choose also. But I choose life. I do not and will not choose death! I want the father of the unborn to choose life, too. I especially want the child to be born and have the wonderful opportunities to CHOOSE LIFE, to experience life and embrace it to the full.

I want that child to have the opportunity to Choose to KNOW God, to learn to LOVE God and to be a witness of Christ’s love to everyone!

“The human person is attracted to God” who is love; because of this, as St. Teresa would say, “*we are born with a heart full of love for God.*” It is this “*Love for God and the desire for God that make us HUMAN!*”

The one, who attempts to live without acknowledging the Creator, will search for meaning and fulfillment in life in all the wrong things...in material things, power or pleasure, but in the end will realize his absolute isolation and aloneness! Without God, he or she will remain in the most profound darkness.

The human person finds its fulfillment only in God! For St. Teresa and St. John, "Only God is enough!"

So, when we deprive the unborn of life, we deprive him or her of this special choice: to consciously realize that God is present to him or her, and he or she is present to God.

The unborn child will never have the CHOICE to "Love God consciously as a living human person!"

The unborn child will never have the CHOICE to know what it is to be fully human!

He never will have the CHOICE to develop human relationships.

He will never know the RIGHT to relationship, communion with God and other members of the Body of Christ here on earth!

Abortion irretrievably negates this right!!!

The 'Right to Life' is the most fundamental of all Human Rights. Without the Right to Life there would be no other rights. There would be no freedom. This is because 'when life is snuffed out, it can never be recuperated!' (Evangelium Vitae, John Paul II)

One way in which we can truly restore the Rights of the Unborn is through the voting process. This November is our next opportunity. We must take our Religious Values with us to the voting booth. We must also be clever. Some candidates are clearly NOT Pro-Life. Some are clearly Pro-Life. These make our decision easy. However, some claim to be Pro-Life, but have done little or nothing to prove it! In choosing a candidate, we must clearly defend life, but also, in cases of uncertainty as to a candidate's real stance or if no one appears to be strongly defensive of life, then we must consider the Common Good of all the people, but never forgetting the unborn. We must inform our consciences. We do this by studying the teachings of the Catholic Church, reflecting on the Scriptures and entering into conscious prayer to invoke the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit to make a sound decision. Sometimes we must choose the one who will do the least harm to this Common Good of all...but always defending the dignity of the unborn.

Then, there is the way that empowers us...Prayer! We must beseech the Father with continuous prayer that is made in the unity of '*one mind and one heart*' (Acts). I always remember the words of Gabriel to Mary in regard to Elizabeth's pregnancy. Remember, Elizabeth is old and beyond the child bearing years. Gabriel simply says, "*Nothing is impossible with God.*" (Luke 1:37)

There are many life issues for the Church to be concerned about, but not all are of equal importance. One has primacy, it is LIFE itself!

During his Homily at his Inaugural Mass in Rome in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the deserts that exist in our world. He spoke of the cause of the deserts and also of the remedy for them. We can think of the deserts as a type of “darkness”.

He spoke of the Good Shepherd who goes into the desert (into the darkness) to find the lost sheep. He also acknowledged that each of us can easily become lost sometime in our lives. We get lost as if in a desert and we lose the way. We need direction. He said.

“There are so many kinds of deserts. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.” (Benedict XVI, Inaugural Homily, April, 24, 2005)

If we recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, we also will realize that Jesus is the “Way” out of these deserts. He is the “Truth” that guides us through the desert to the gardens where living water flows. He is “Life” itself, or as we often say, He is Eternal Life, “Not the endless succession of days in a calendar, but rather something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which { and by which } God embraces us and we embrace God”...through Christ. (Spe Salvi # 12)

What Jesus brought to the world through his Birth, Death and Resurrection, was something radically new. He brought an encounter with the living God, and thus an encounter with a Hope that is more powerful than the suffering of any slavery, a Hope which transforms each human person who accepts Jesus as Lord and that transforms the world itself from within. Regardless of the social structures that exist, “*those washed clean in Baptism and having been given to drink of the same Spirit and received the Body and Blood of the Lord together, alongside one another*” they were brothers and sisters to one another, { we are brothers and sisters to each other } *even if Civil structures remained unchanged.*” There was a conversion within each Christian and this “*Changed society from within.*” (SS # 4)

To the deserts came the life giving water of the Spirit. To the “Valley of Darkness” came the Light of the World. That light changed everything...once and for all. My brothers and sisters of Amarillo, we are Light to this part of the world today. Let us not fear to continue to proclaim the Dignity of all Human Life, from conception to

natural death. Even when all may seem very difficult, and we may feel so weak in the face of our secular, materialistic society, let us remember the words of St. Paul.

“It is in my weakness that God’s strength reaches perfection within me.”

In the darkest hour, let us allow God to shine brightly through us in the defense of all human life, but especially in defense of the unborn. Remember, this *“darkness shall not prevail.”* (John 1)

God bless you all!

1. { Note on *pharmakeia* in regard to Galatians 5:20.

The early 2nd Century physician Soranos of Ephesus, in his book Gynecology, uses the word *pharmakeia* to refer to both contraceptive and abortive potions. The 1st Century biographer Plutarch mentions *pharmakeia* in quoting ‘a severe law’ permitting a husband to divorce his wife, not only for adultery, but also for “medicine in regard to children”.

In Galatians 5:20, Paul appears to be condemning sexual impurity and illicit drug use that is somehow associated with it. Knowing that drug-induced abortion was common practice of the period which the epistle was written and that *farmakia* can refer to abortifacients drugs, it is not unreasonable to believe that Paul intended to include abortifacients drugs in this denunciation of drug abuse as it is associated with sexual immorality.” (Dr. Steve Waterhouse, *Abortion in Rome and the Early Church’s Response*, Westcliff Press, 2006)

2. The Church’s Response comes from various Patristic Authors:

The Epistle of Barnabas 19:5; Tertullian in Apology 9:8; Cyprian in Epistle 58; Basil in Letters 188:2 and 8; Diognetus 5:6, Augustine in On Marriage and Concupiscence 1:15-17; the Apocalypse of Peter 8; the Didache 2:2; Athenagoras, ‘A Plea for Christians’; Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*; Minucius Felix, ‘The Octavius of Minucius Felix; Jerone, ‘Letters’ and Chrysostum, ‘Homilies on Acts and Romans’.

**✘ Most Reverend Patrick J. Zurek, Bishop of Amarillo, Respect Life Rally: 40 Days of Prayer, City Park, Amarillo, Texas
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