



Mass for Life

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Cathedral of St. Joseph

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Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

The first reading from Colossians speaks the truth clearly: “You are God’s chosen ones”. Every person is God’s chosen ones. The opening prayer sets forth clearly what ought be our response to being so chosen: give thanks and defend life:

God our Creator, we give thanks to you, who alone have the power to impart the breath of life as you form each of us in our mother’s womb; grant we pray that we, whom you made stewards of creation, may remain faithful to this sacred trust and constant in safeguarding the dignity of every human life.¹

It is important to remind ourselves of this sacred trust on this the 43rd anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision to allow abortions essentially for any reason and at any time. It is the law of the land that the unborn are not persons even though God formed them and are therefore disposable or as Pope Francis has noted they are considered as throwaways. Today we pray for a change of heart and law that protects all life from conception to natural death.

Less than a month ago we celebrated a birth, the birth of the Christ child. Yet we know even then that government leaders sought the child’s death. The culture of death is not of recent invention.

Pope Francis has written:

In a frail human being, each one of us is invited to recognize the face of the Lord, who in his human flesh experienced the indifference and solitude to which we so often condemn the poorest of the poor . . . Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned to unjustly being aborted, bears the face of Jesus, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born and then just after his birth experienced the world’s rejection².

Our Mass intention today and at Masses throughout the country, is in penance for the violation of the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. It is estimated that over 58 million little ones³ created by God with unique looks, gifts and capacity to love and be loved have, by human hands, not been allowed to live, to breathe, to learn, to give and to love. We miss those potential parents and friends, farmers and teachers and so many more who God created for a purpose but were not allowed to attain that purpose. While we know they are in the hands of their loving God, their absence makes our hearts ache.

Yet we do so with hope. Our Mass intention today also is to pray for the legal protection of the unborn children to come. We do so in thanksgiving for all those in the pro-life movement who have come forward often in hostile environments to protect the unborn by prayer, by practice, by protesting and by presenting the Gospel of Life to prick consciences and encourage conversion of hearts. Especially gratifying is the witness of the young who are grateful for their gift of life and who seek to nourish the culture of life.

We also pray in penance today for ourselves as individuals and as Church for not having been adequately present and welcoming to so many mothers dealing with dizzying choices in troubled times. Yet here too there is hope. We in our diocese, especially through Catholic Family Services, offer support through counseling programs, the Mother Teresa Fund that offers financial assistance, adoption services and grief and healing outreach programs. No one should have to make agonizing life choices alone or bear unintended consequences alone. "Come to me," Jesus said, "and I will give you rest." Come to His Church and as his instrument she will give you rest. God's love and mercy are ever available to everyone.

We pray in penance today also for the bad fruit that has resulted from this sad Supreme Court decision. I speak especially about the derogation of our national psyche where violence in the womb has spread to violence in the home, in the school and on the streets. I speak of the view of children as collateral to be marketed in human trafficking or as body parts to be sold.

I speak of the tragedy of gender selection abortions, in the taking of a twin because only one child is wanted, and in the destruction of those little ones suffering some seeming physical defect before we got to know their personalities. I speak also of the attack on religious liberty and freedom of conscience to shut down the courageous call for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. Indeed there is much for which we need God's forgiveness, all of us.

Yet there is hope reflected in each of you and those who march this week. Let us all whatever our age, station or vocation stay the course. Let us recommit to be witnesses for life from conception to natural death. How powerful witness can be.

I have told this story before but it seems especially appropriate on this anniversary of law gone astray: "There were forty soldiers in the revered Twelfth Legion of Rome who professed faith in Jesus Christ. One day the Emperor ordered that all soldiers offer a sacrifice to pagan gods. They as one responded, "you can have our armor and even our bodies but our hearts allegiance belong to Jesus Christ." As a result they were marched out onto a frozen lake in the middle of winter and stripped of their clothes. At any time they could renounce Christ and be spared from freezing to death. Instead they huddled closely and sang a song of victory, "Forty martyrs for Christ." That night 39 of them fell to icy graves. The last one stumbled to the shore and renounced Christ. The officer in charge of guarding the men was so moved by the witness of the others that he ran out onto the icy lake, threw off his clothes and confessed his faith in Jesus Christ. At sunrise the Roman soldiers found forty men who had given their all for the cause of Christ, Savior and Lord of Life.

Grateful to the Creator for our lives, let us pray for conversion of hearts and for the strength to witness our faith as did the Forty Martyrs. As we pray in penance and pray for the unborn yet to come, may we do so with integrity, with humility and with hope being true as God's chosen ones to our sacred trust to safeguard the dignity of every human life.

St. Joseph, our patron, protect us and the unborn. Mary, Mother of Life, pray for us.

1 – Collect, Roman Missal, Mass for Life

2 – Pope Francis, Address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, Sept. 20, 2013

3 - <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/01/21/57762169-abortion-in-america-since-roe-vs-wade-in-1973/>