



Mass Homily
***Offered on the 40th Anniversary of the United States
Supreme Court Decision in the Case of Roe vs. Wade***

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Today we sadly note the 40th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision to allow abortions for any reason and at any time. Basically it is the law of the land that the unborn are not persons and are therefore disposable. I wonder if the justices would have decided this way had they experienced the miracle of modern technology that now shows active life in the womb and documents pain before birth or if they had heard the testimony of those mothers who continue to carry the heavy burden of the loss of their child in this way. I would like to think so. 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 sought the child's death. The culture of death is not of recent invention. Pope Benedict XVI in his book Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives makes this telling point:

“From the moment of his birth, he belongs outside the realm of what is important and powerful in worldly terms. Yet it is this unimportant and powerless child that proves to be the truly powerful one, the one on whom ultimately everything depends. So one aspect of becoming Christians is having to leave behind what everyone else thinks and wants, the prevailing standards, in order to enter into the light of the truth of our being, and aided by that light to find the right path.”¹

That is what we do when we pray for and act on behalf of the culture of life – when we seek to protect the little ones we are on the right path whatever the prevailing standards.

That life is sacred from conception to natural death is not simply a teaching of the Church. It is inherent in the creative hand of God. The Catechism reminds us:

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end; no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.²

Yet for forty years to destroy innocents has been the law of our land.

Forty years: a time frame not brief yet not long. Forty years is long enough to allow reflection on what has gone before and short enough to encourage us to look forward with hope. Satan pursued our Lord in the desert for forty days. Satan tested him and our Lord showed us that Satan need not prevail. And so today forty years after the United States Supreme Court gave in to the temptation in our times, we gather to reflect on what has gone before but also to look forward with hope. For evil need not, indeed will not, prevail.

For what has gone before us these forty years our Mass intention today, as it is at Masses throughout the country, is in penance for the violation of the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. If statistics are to be believed, nearly 56 million little ones 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 love³. Likely there are more. In our small state there are at least 50,000 South Dakotans not living amongst us. 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 be in our midst. While we know they are in the hands of their loving God, their absence makes our hearts ache.

Yet there is 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. Polls suggest that more Americans are now pro-life to some degree than pro-abortion. Especially gratifying is the witness of the young, those who have empty desks in their schools 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. Since that tragic day we in our diocese especially through Catholic Family Services offers support through counseling programs, the Mother Teresa Fund that offers financial assistance, adoption services and grief and healing outreach. No one should have to make agonizing life choices alone or be driven by base money pressures. "Come to me," Jesus said, "and I will give you rest."⁴ Come to His Church and as his instrument she will give you rest. Share that good news.

We pray in penance also for those government officials and those leaders in Catholic education, health care and charitable institutions who think they can compartmentalize moral truth through legal fictions in order to achieve financial and business advantage and be accepted and popular in the secular world. It is folly to think we can compromise with the devil; the devil never loses those bets, and the result is threats to the salvation of souls, including those leaders who try.

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. We are told that the vast majority of abortions are ones of convenience. It has resulted in 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 unpleasant 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 will march this week. Let us all whatever our age, station or vocation stay the course.

I told this story before but it seems especially appropriate on this 40th 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 their witness that he replaced the man who had broken the pact and walked out onto the ice, threw off his clothes and confessed 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.

Let us pray for conversion of hearts and for the strength to witness our faith as did the Forty Martyrs for Christ. As we prayer in penance and pray for the unborn yet to come, may we do so with integrity, with humility and with hope. St. Joseph, our patron, protect us and the unborn. Mary, Mother of Life, pray for us.

¹ – Jesus of Nazareth: the Infancy Narratives, 2012, p. 67

² – Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, p. 2258

³ – National Right to Life, Education Fact Sheet, Jan 2012

⁴ – Mt: 11:28