



**Mass for Life homily
January 22, 2011
Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
St Joseph Cathedral**

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the victims of abortion, the little ones God created, may they be with Him at peace in heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those mothers who for whatever reason have chosen to have abortions and now struggle with the consequences. May they be comforted to know God loves them and that His mercy is present for them.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who with love, compassion, courage and patience stand up for the culture of life by vote, by word, by action and by prayer; may they not be discouraged but rather be assured that they are instruments of God's love.

Thank you for coming this morning on what is sadly the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion at almost any time in a pregnancy and for nearly any reason. This legally and morally flawed court decision has deeply divided our nation and has resulted in an acceptance of violence as a legitimate means to solve personal problems. But most significantly nearly 60 million young ones have died since that tragic decision on that fateful day.

Pope Benedict XVI in his recent interview published in a book under the title *Light of the World*, made this observation: "Pope Paul VI has been proved prophetically right. He was convinced that society robs itself of its greatest hopes when it kills human beings through abortion. How many children are killed who might one day have been geniuses, who could have given humanity something new, who could have given us a new Mozart or some new technical discovery? We need to stop and think about the great human capacity that is being destroyed here – even apart from the fact that unborn children are human persons whose dignity and right to life we have to respect."

So once again we gather at Holy Mass with penitential hearts and plead for forgiveness for the violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and for those Catholics in public office and in health care and in families who contrary to the clear teaching of the Christ have willingly or unwillingly become accomplices. And we gather to humbly pray for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life for all from conception to natural death.

Thank you for all you do to defend life and witness to the truth that children are a natural gift from God to be loved, nurtured and celebrated, not a burden, an economic challenge, a problem or a punishment. We remember the penetrating words of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta spoken at the National Prayer Breakfast some years ago. She said: "the greatest poverty of all is for a nation to take the

life of an innocent unborn baby so we could live as we want.” How impoverished is our nation by that standard of convenience.

We know however that not all abortions are approached with that mindset. We pray for women in crisis as a result of pregnancy and we stand with them. I state once again that the Diocese of Sioux Falls is ready to help them with medical costs, housing, counseling, adoption services, whatever is needed. We are also ready to help those who have had abortions and are now struggling with the aftermath. God’s mercy is there for them. This is what the Mother Teresa Fund is for – to ease tangential worries so that the core issue of right from wrong, life from death, light from darkness can be seen more clearly.

Just in the last few days we read of an abortionist in Philadelphia being arrested, accused of for many years having used some of the cruelest techniques to take the lives of children both before and after birth, and sometimes their mothers. His so-called health clinic was dubbed a shop of horrors, despite being known to government regulators of health clinics. The grand jury report which led to his arrest included these chilling lines: “bureaucratic inertia is not exactly news, we think the reason no one acted is because the women in question were poor and of color, because the victims were infants without identities, and because the subject was the political football of abortion.” In New York City it was reported that among Blacks, African Americans, there are now three abortions for every two births. How many of those are true choices and how many are coerced? Respect for life is not a political football. Nor is it simply a difference in religious belief. It is a civil rights travesty that ought to shock us all.

We prayed at the Planned Parenthood abortion building on 41st Street just this past Thursday as we do every month. It was very cold but our discomfort pales in comparison to the pain that is willingly inflicted inside that building on the innocent little ones who have no choice and on their mothers who think they have no choice. We pray for the day when that building across the street from a high school is closed or perhaps converted into a house of life. Thus, there is much more praying for us to do, and much need for even greater efforts to change laws. For too many if it is legal it must be okay. That in itself is wrong.

Yet the only secure way for us as a nation and as individuals to build a culture of life is to change hearts one by one. Our lasting mission is a call for conversion. Many of those who support abortion think they are doing something good. They are misguided not evil and so conversion is possible. There are many examples of it which you know well.

So I would encourage you not to become discouraged, to keep the faith, and to continue the struggle. The prophet Isaiah foretold, “the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.” We recently celebrated the birth of that light, He came among us unborn in the womb of Mary and then walked among us, died for us, rose and instituted the Church. His presence in the Holy Eucharist is itself light and hope personified.

There is a poem by Emily Dickinson that might encourage us: “If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain. If I can ease one life from aching, or cool one pain, or help one fainting robin unto his nest again, I shall not live in vain.” Your efforts will never be in vain.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. May our nation be transformed from a culture of death and once again hunger and thirst for righteousness, to become a culture of life. Until that day, we together will continue to seek penance and we will continue to pray. May Mary, the Mother of Life, bless you all, and be with all those little ones and their mothers in danger today.