

This Far By Faith

Being Pro-Life Today

By Rev. J. Terry Steib, SVD

This week a large number of high school students from our Diocese will be going to Washington, DC to march in the annual Pro-Life March against the Roe vs. Wade decision of the United States Supreme Court. I am proud of our young people who are backing their words with action. And their action offers me the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be Pro-Life.

One of the greatest evils of our time is abortion. It robs countless children of their lives before they even have a chance to breathe the gift of God's air in their lungs. Somehow, in the morass of our highly secularized culture, we need to bring an end to abortions through prayer, through positive political action that will help people understand its evil, and through a continuing program of education that will help, not only our young people, but also our people of all ages, to understand that separating the act of sex from marriage is indefensible in our times. We need to help our young people to realize that pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease do not last just for short periods of time in their lives; instead, they do change their lives forever. At the base of our defense of marriage and our opposition to abortion is a fundamental principle: **human life is sacred.**

Because human life is sacred, the Catholic bishops of the United States in 1999 called for a deeper awareness of what it means to be assimilated into a culture, and the

difficulties such assimilation can bring. In the document **Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics**, the bishops challenged us by saying, “American Catholics have long sought to assimilate into U.S. cultural life. But in assimilating, we have too often been digested. We have been changed by our culture too much, and we have changed it not enough. If we are leaven, we must bring to our culture the whole Gospel, which is a Gospel of life and joy. That is our vocation as believers. And there is no better place to start than promoting the beauty and sanctity of human life.”¹

When we promote the beauty and sanctity of human life, it is necessary to promote life in all of its facets. We cannot hide from protecting our people who are old and ill from those who would euthanize them because they are no longer “useful.” My Dad, who is almost 93, is more than useful. He loves me. He loves my brothers and sister. He may not be able to cut sugar cane as he once did, and his garden has gotten smaller with each passing season, but he reminds me everyday of the beauty of a faithful and well-led life. So, my Dad is immensely useful and the many like him deserve all the support we can give them as they live out their lives.

Somehow we need to learn ways to protect people who are living in despair and who wish to kill themselves rather than assisting them in committing suicide. It is our task as Christians to help the despairing to understand the reality of hope and of living with the wonder of the surprises that God sends into our lives.

¹ **Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, para 25**

When a child is brought into our world, we need to foster that child into a human being who is well nourished and well educated both religiously and in secular skills so that he or she can become what God intended when, through the gift of their parents, God gave them life.

In other words, we must promote a “consistent ethic of life.” Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the former Archbishop of Chicago, once described the pro-life movement as a “seamless garment”, much like the garment that had been given to Joseph in the Hebrew Scriptures. But as he journeyed on, trying to help people everywhere to understand the importance of being Pro-life; his own research and the help of companion theologians helped him to embrace the “consistent ethic of life.”

Regardless of which phrase you might find more palatable, what is most important is that in every way and at all stages of life, we as Catholics defend and are deeply dedicated to life. And if we say that we believe in life, then we must be opposed to abortion, capital punishment, assisted suicide, economic injustice, racism, euthanasia and unjust wars; and we must embrace the universe in which we live and which is the source of life to so much of what is important to us. Not one of the issues that I just mentioned is a simple one. Every single issue is filled with moral dilemmas calling for careful pastoral and practical responses that will create in the people around us a sense of what Jesus told us when he said that we must love our neighbor as ourselves.

In a speech in May of last year to the members of the Pro-Life Movement in Italy, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, said: “For Christians, in this fundamental context of society, an urgent and indispensable field for the apostolate and for Gospel witness is

always open: to protect life with courage and love in all its stages.” As our young people return from their important defense of life in Washington, and as we all reflect on the needs of our nation and our Church, the Pope’s call “to protect life with courage and love in all its stages” is a clarion call to recognize how important human life is to all of us and to each of us, and to do all in our power to promote its sacredness in all we do.