

THE MEANING OF LIFE

“We must all care for life, cherish life, with tenderness, warmth ... caring for life from the beginning to the end.” -Pope Francis

FROM BISHOP NOONAN

All Human Life is Precious, January 22, 2013

I write as a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in the role of teacher. In that role, I discuss the Roe v. Wade decision by the United States Supreme Court. On this decision, the conversation for the Catholic Church does not start with rights but with belief. We believe in God, the creator of all life, and because of this, life is sacred from conception to natural death. Mary, the mother of Jesus, showed us the sacredness of life when she accepted the Gift of Jesus. We believe that Christ came not so that life would be taken away but so that life would be restored through, with and in God. As the mother in 2 Maccabees 7:1,22,23 eloquently speaks: “It was not I who gave you the breath of life, nor was it I who set in order the elements of which each of you is composed...it is the Creator of the universe Who shapes each man’s beginning, as He brings about the origin of everything.

Belief in the sacredness of human life was disregarded forty years ago with the Roe v Wade decision by the United States Supreme Court. With this decision, the popular view of human life was changed leaving behind an erosion in the respect for life. Human life became a throw-away of our society. All life, including the life of an unborn child, is devalued, less important.

We have witnessed this erosion in the commercialization and promotion of abortion; when the consent of fathers and of parents of minors is ignored or outlawed; with the rising demand for hastening the deaths of those who are ill, mentally or physically challenged, or aged who require our care and attention; in an alarming culture of death promoted through the plethora of technological options, such as television and radio programs and games; in the increase of human trafficking where Florida now ranks #3 in this horrendous disregard of the human person; and in the effects of cyber-bullying, where its human destruction scars our Central Florida community.

“The Law of God, written on the heart of every person, continues to demand of us the highest regard for human life and human dignity.”

It saddens me that during these last forty years, we have wandered in the desert, turning away from God. We have discarded God’s infinite love by discarding each other, even the most vulnerable among us, the unborn. I pray that we will get rid of all bitterness, all passion and anger, harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind. In place of these, may we return to God, the Source of all patience and encouragement, the Source of forgiveness. Human dignity, then, is the issue. It is not a matter of one religious body imposing its morality on another person. Nor is it an issue of a person’s right to choose. The Law of God, written on the heart of every person, continues to demand of us the highest regard for human life and human dignity.

These conditions demand that all people of good will rise in concerted action to defend the right of each person to his/her life; a right that is God-given and therefore a right that is both inalienable and inviolable. Abortion, sterilization, euthanasia, criminal violence, private and public plundering, individual and general lawlessness, are but the responses of a society which is unable to face the demands of an advanced and secularized civilization and which is unwilling to turn once again to God.

You are a precious gift of God. How deficit our world would be without you. How deficit our world is without those unborn who have been denied life at our hands.

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Death Penalty Robs Dignity, June 2013

*Bless those who persecute you,
bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Have the same regard for one another;
do not be haughty but associate with the lowly;
do not be wise in your own estimation.
Romans 12:14-16*

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Last week we held a prayer service to pray for victims and the perpetrators of an horrific act, the killing of another human person. We took the opportunity to pray on the eve of the execution of Mr. Elmer Carroll, a perpetrator of the crime of murder. We also came to pray for Christine McGowan, the 10 year old girl, who lived in Apopka, whom Mr. Carroll murdered.

We gathered to pray for two families, first the victims' families and for the victims, those whose lives were tragically taken. We prayed for their parents, brothers, sisters and friends who have been left behind at the death of their loved ones. Nothing we can do can return their loved ones, but we pray that God may bring healing and forgiveness to them. We came together to pray for the perpetrator, Mr. Elmer Carroll, and for his family. We prayed that Mr. Carroll may seek God's forgiveness and compassion. We prayed for his family, who in a very real way, have already lost a loved one.

We also gathered to pray for an end to the death penalty. Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote, "The Gospel of Life" in 1995. In that encyclical, he affirms that direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. He also states that the punishment should offer the offender an incentive and help to change his or her behavior and be rehabilitated. If society is able to contain a person who has committed a crime, then there is really no need to put this person to death. This is especially true if the person is able to convert while his time in prison. When I visited the prison to speak with those convicted of crime, I remember a young man convicted of murder say to me that he was, "ever so grateful to be able to allow the grace of God into his life; rather than die an unrepented sinner."

When I was a principal, one of our students, a young girl, was killed. It was senseless. It was tragic and shocking. The child's family, friends, children of the school, faculty, staff, the parish community and so many others were filled with sorrow and pain. Yet in the midst of all of this suffering, we garnered enough strength in the Lord to forgive. In our turning to God, our broken hearts began to mend in true and lasting healing.

Finally, we prayed for our legislators, our governor and our judges that they may see the death penalty as a destructive tool robbing individuals and their families of their God-given dignity.

During the month of June, two more executions are scheduled in the state of Florida. May we extend the same regard to one another. May we be instruments of conversion and forgiveness in our communities.

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Respect Life, January 2012

A child is born to us; a son is given us. We have just concluded our Christmas season and the Good News of the angels heralded to the shepherds is still ringing in our ears. This precious gift of life, human in flesh, divine in nature, is given to us so that we might have everlasting life. Not one of us would deny the coming of Jesus. Not one of us would advocate for any law that might prevent His coming.

So, we find ourselves in January, a month where the number 22 seems to stand out as a red flag day for me. January 22 is the thirty-eighth anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, the landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court which legally allowed abortions to occur. Since 1973, we have advocated for the death of the unborn. The lives of these children of God would be spared because of economic difficulty, despair, suffering, self-pride or greed. I wonder how we have come to this and I think about it in the context of the birth of Jesus. What would we have missed if Mary had chosen against the pregnancy of the precious Child for which we just celebrated His birth and have done so for 2011 years?

Some of you may say, “Well, that was different.” How so? The life of a child is God-given. Each child born is a gift to us and a blessing in whatever way he/she develops and brings forth the power of God. I grieve over even one untimely death of one of God’s creations, a unique and irreplaceable human being.

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There are people, both men and women, who suffer from guilt and separation from the Church because of participation in an abortion at some point in their life. Healing and God’s love, mercy and compassion are there for those who seek reconciliation for what one may feel is an “unforgiveable sin.” Our Diocesan Office of Advocacy and Justice offers Project Rachel and Rachel’s Vineyard, a confidential process for healing and reconciliation through nationally recognized post-abortion programs approved by the Catholic Church.

Pope Benedict XVI said, “The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, consequently, cannot be a human right—it is the very opposite.”

I ask that you pray for each of us as we lead others to advocate for life in all stages. For information on Project Rachel, Rachel’s Vineyard call the Office of Advocacy and Justice at 407-246-4819. My sisters and brothers, during this new year, may we remain joyous as God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.