

PRO-LIFE MASS DURING FORTY DAYS FOR LIFE

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church, Harrisburg

October 25, 2008

I wish to begin this homily with a word of sincere gratitude to those who have organized the 40 Days for Life here in our diocese. I thank also all those who have participated in these 40 days with your prayers and sacrifices and all of you who are here today to pray and bear witness to the Gospel of life.

In his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, the great Pope John Paul II wrote that “a great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world.” He wrote that great encyclical 13 years ago. It is as relevant now as it was then. And still, a great prayer for life is urgently needed. That is what these forty days have been about. But our prayer for life must continue when these forty days end, daily prayer so that “the power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit” of the culture of death. A civilization of life and love will only become a reality by the grace of God, as a fruit of prayer. “Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective

weapons against the forces of evil.” Those promoting the culture of death have some powerful resources – just think of the financial strength of Planned Parenthood. But we have a more powerful force: the help of God, for whom nothing is impossible. We must not lose hope or become discouraged by the power of those who engage in evil practices or who promote and support laws which are hostile to life. We must pray and work for their conversion.

In the wonderful reading today from Saint Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the holy apostle writes about how we are to live the truth in love. In so doing, we grow into him who is the head of the Body, Christ Jesus. In so doing, we are not “tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery.”

Sadly, in our nation today, many are tossed by the waves of false teaching and deceptive propaganda against life. We have heard Catholic politicians who misrepresent the Church’s teaching on abortion. Some even preposterously claim that the Church through the centuries has not been in agreement on the sanctity of life from the moment of conception. We must proclaim the truth in charity, as Saint Paul said. And the truth is

that the Church has always affirmed the moral evil of abortion. The teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. We have heard other Catholic politicians say “OK, I believe what the Catholic Church teaches, that human life begins at the moment of conception, but this is a personal and private matter of my faith, and I cannot impose my religious faith on others. I’m sorry, but this is not just a matter of religious faith. It is first a biological question and the scientific truth is that a new human being, distinct from the mother and father, comes into existence at the moment of conception. This is an objective fact! This is also a moral issue, an issue of human rights. It is part of the natural law, not just a Catholic teaching. Those who signed the Declaration of Independence knew this when they proclaimed the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We are to speak the truth in charity, Saint Paul says. The truth is clear. Abortion is an unspeakable crime because it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. The protection of the unborn child is a demand of justice! Pro-choice propagandists try to hide the true nature of abortion, using ambiguous language, calling abortion “an interruption or termination of pregnancy.” We, instead, must teach the truth clearly and

unambiguously: Human life is sacred. Abortion is the killing of an innocent child in the womb. The unborn child needs and deserves our respect and protection. The scourge of abortion in our land has diminished our nation's moral integrity.

Saint Paul urged the Ephesians to speak and live the truth in love, in charity. Truthfulness and charity!! I have spoken of the truth, something we are challenged to defend in the midst of a culture of relativism. Now, the other half of Paul's counsel: charity. In the face of error, we must confront and correct, but always with charity, with love for the other, even when they are perpetrating error. We must present the truth in a way that shines with the love of Christ. The conversion of others is more likely to occur when they encounter in us the power of Christ's love and His mercy. How do we love our pro-choice opponents, our enemies, and those who attack or malign us? How do we love those who advance the killing of the innocent? It is only with the help of God's grace, which is why we need prayer and the strength of the Holy Eucharist. Jesus commanded us: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Do not return evil for evil." In another place, Saint Paul says: "overcome evil with good." In our prayer, we should always remember those who promote the culture of

death, including abortionists, and pray for their conversion. Such prayer is a spiritual work of mercy.

Our service of the Gospel of life also and always includes help for women who are facing crisis pregnancies. And it always includes outreach with love and mercy to women who have had abortions. We pray that they will repent and experience the wondrous mercy of God our Father. Society tends to ignore or dismiss the suffering experienced by so many women who have had abortions. We cannot and will not do so. The Church reaches out with the love and mercy of our Savior to women who have been harmed by the sin of abortion.

My brothers and sisters, these are challenging times. Let us heed the words of the apostle Paul and proclaim the truth in love! May the Blessed Virgin Mary, who accepted Life in the name of us all and for the sake of us all, assist us with her prayers. As we continue in these forty days for life, let us intensify our prayers. And let us ask our Blessed Mother to look down upon us and upon our nation. To her we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. She is our most gracious advocate. May she turn her eyes of mercy toward us!