

## **“RESPECTING THE DESIGN OF GOD’S LIFE-GIVING ORDER OF CREATION”**

**Homily at the Mass for the Walk for Life Westcoast  
Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Temple of the Lord  
January 27, 2018**

**Readings: Rev 21:1-5a; Ps 84; Lk 1:26-38**

### **Introduction**

As I’m sure many of you know – given who you are as people drawn to attend a Mass such as this – during these weeks Congress has been debating House Resolution 4712, the “Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act,” a bill which would prohibit a health care practitioner from failing to exercise the proper degree of care in the case of a child who survives an abortion or attempted abortion.

Amazingly, but I suppose not surprisingly, there are people who actually oppose giving the same protections to these infants that all other children enjoy who are outside of the womb. I suppose it should come as no surprise, then, that a popular radio news program did a feature story on women in Chicago who, before the Roe decision, performed abortions for other women, because, as it was stated, back then “women had few options for terminating a pregnancy.” Of course, they did have one very good and happy option: it is called “birth.”

### **God’s Design**

Why is it that some people would not see the birth of a child as a happy end to a pregnancy in every case? Why would some people oppose helping a child who survives a botched abortion to live rather than be left to die?

Well, let’s think about how God put this world together. Specifically, let’s think about how God gave the human person certain very strong attractions, and a powerful urge to engage in an act capable of producing a new life. This reflects the very design of creation: the whole universe is ordered toward life. Even when a natural disaster brings about destruction and even death, that destruction gives way to new life. Likewise, God’s design of the human person – certainly biologically but also, because of that, in every other way – is to unite a man and woman together so that they will welcome and rejoice at the awesome gift of new life, and together love and care for the new life into maturity.

Such is God’s creative action, the creation of order out of chaos. And so, when we respect that order and organize our lives accordingly, then our lives, and our society as a whole, will be well ordered. But when we move away from that order, and try to do things our own way because we think we have a better idea, all kinds of chaotic mischief erupts.

Just think about so many of the social ills that are caused or exacerbated by our society’s refusal to accept this God-given ordering of how He created us, even in our very bodies: family breakdown, children growing up in broken and abusive homes, the devaluing of human life in so many different ways. It has now gotten to the point to where many people will even resort to killing in order to indulge those urges in a way that rejects God’s plan. That is why they consider some new lives not worthy of being welcomed into the world.

### **God’s Saving Presence**

There is really nothing new about that, though. It’s at the very beginning of the Bible: God creating order out of chaos, and then the fall of our first parents, which reintroduces chaos into the world. But God does not abandon us, He does not remain far off. The gospel passage

we just heard proclaimed should sound familiar to us, as it features prominently during the Christmas season which we have been celebrating. God makes Himself present to us, even physically present, through the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is told to name her Son “Jesus,” a name which means “God is with us.”

Now, Jesus is our Savior; this means, then, that God’s very presence among us is our salvation. And God saves us by restoring us to the order with which He originally created us. This is the vision we hear from St. John in our first reading. The old order with its sorrow has passed away: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away”; “the sea is no more” – the sea was considered the place of chaos, an abyss that was beyond control. In its place God gives us “the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

So you see here, once again, the whole ordering of creation, heaven and earth, toward life. “A bride adorned for her husband.” The new Jerusalem is the Church who, as the bride of Christ, begets and nurtures new life for his Kingdom – that is, us, the members of the Church.

### **Temple of the Lord**

But let’s back up a little bit: if God is going to be present to us, it means that God needs a dwelling place. And the dwelling place of God is the temple. That is why the Mass we are celebrating today is Votive Mass of the “Blessed Virgin Mary, Temple of the Lord.” What God fulfills in her He prefigured in the Temple of the Old Covenant. There God made His dwelling in the midst of His people, within the Holy of Holies, which held in safekeeping the remnants from the people’s wandering in the Sinai desert, when God was accompanying them to the Promised Land. There a veil separated His presence from the people, sheltering the divine presence. But that veil of separation was removed by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. The Archangel Gabriel tells Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” God’s Spirit overshadows Mary, covering her as with a veil; better yet, she *is* the veil through which God’s Son would enter the world, accomplishing the marriage of his divinity and our humanity. Mary’s womb was that dwelling place, her body became the Temple of the Lord.

But St. Paul teaches us that, for every one of us, our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19). We are not our own, we belong to God, even in our body. And so St. Paul goes onto say: “... you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20).

Well now, if the temple is the dwelling place of God, this means that in some sense God – in the person of the Holy Spirit – dwells within our bodies. Somehow, then, we follow the pattern that was set in a singular way by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Certainly we can understand this of the female half of the human race, to whom God has given the awesome privilege of being the bearers of new life. They have the capacity, within their bodies, to bear a new human life with an immortal soul, made in the image and likeness of God. Appreciating this gets us on the path toward recognizing the ingenious order with which God created the universe. But Paul is speaking of everyone, men too. How can our bodies be a dwelling place of God?

God’s Word became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But God continues to be present to us through His Word taking flesh in the form of the Eucharist. We become literally a temple of God when we receive Holy Communion, God dwelling within our bodies.

And so yes, we must glorify God with our bodies, by keeping ourselves pure in body as well as in mind and in speech.

### **Turning to Mary**

When God dwelt in His Temple of old, in Jerusalem, His prophets often excoriated His people for their superficial religion. Sure, they fulfilled the minimum requirements of the Law, but that was it. They did not live by the Law's higher demands of justice and charity and love of neighbor. Their worship consisted of nothing more than going through the motions of empty rituals. That is lifeless, contrary to the order of God's creation.

As Qoheleth says, there is nothing new under the sun. How often do we fall into this same trap, rejecting those demands Christ makes on us that we find just too inconvenient! Receiving God's presence into our bodies is meant to turn us into the presence of God in the world, so that others might know Him and be saved. We, too, can be guilty of superficial religion, by which we move away from God's life-giving order and reintroduce chaos into our world.

So let us again turn to our Mother, and follow the pattern that Mary sets for us. Notice her profound humility in this encounter with the Archangel Gabriel. As one Scripture scholar put it: "Note the humility, obedience, modesty, charity, and resignation of the Virgin, for though saluted by the angel as Mother of God, she calls herself His handmaid, not His mother; and she resigns herself completely to His will, so that in it, and with it, and through it, she might do something pleasing to Him" (Cornelius a Lapide, "The Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke," p. 166).

To do something pleasing to God: nothing should give us more delight than this. We please God by imitating those virtues of our Blessed Mother, virtues that stand in direct opposition to the values the world holds out to us: humility, not entitlement; obedience, not will to power; modesty, not carnal indulgence; charity, not greed; resignation, not defiance.

### **Conclusion**

We live in an age that tells us we can compartmentalize, even with the truth: take what you like, leave what you don't. But it doesn't work that way, not if you want to live by God's order, which makes us capable of giving and receiving love, which in turn orients us toward life. To affirm the dignity of the human life in the womb is to affirm every other single aspect of this order; to set aside any one aspect unravels the entire order, bringing back chaos and all that goes with it – death and mourning, wailing and pain.

In our Blessed Mother, we have the counter-sign: Mary reflects the order with which God originally created the universe, and re-creates it through her Son. This is what it means to be pro-life: to recognize, accept, and live out this entire order. It means to organize our whole lives around respect for this ingenious divine order, living it out in our bodies as well as in our minds and hearts, our attitudes and our values. Then Christ's words will be realized in our lives: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." Then we will know happiness with him now in this life, and perfect happiness with him forever in the life of heaven.