

**“Old Lies and the Ever New First Principle of Discipleship”**  
**Homily for Mass in Observance of the National Day of Prayer for the Legal**  
**Protection of Unborn Children**  
**Friday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1**  
**St. Mary’s Cathedral, January 22, 2021**

**Introduction**

“...what has become obsolete and has grown old is close to disappearing.” We just heard these words in our first reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews. The epistle is speaking here about the old covenant as opposed to the new; the old covenant has grown old and is close to disappearing.

**Sin**

God made this covenant with His People; He gave them a higher law for them to abide by, but the problem is the People could not do it. They kept violating that covenant. They kept turning their backs on their God and the Law He gave them. As the reading says, “...if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for a second one. But he finds fault with them and says: ... they did not stand by my covenant and I ignored them, says the Lord.”

God’s People of old violated the covenant that the one true God made with them by making covenants with their pagan neighbors. Part of making a covenant, this pact that had mutual obligations – with blessings for those who followed it and curses for those who violated it – part of this covenant is that they would have to worship those pagan gods. So, they violated the first and foundational commandment. But it gets even worse, because those ancient pagan peoples practiced child sacrifice. So, God’s People went over even to that, sacrificing their children to the god, Moloch.

This shows the depths of sin. It is sin, really, that gets old, sin that gets obsolete; it wears out and wears thin, eventually to the point that we can see through its lies. That is happening now in our own society. As concerned as we are for the future of the pro-life movement, nonetheless people today are beginning to see through the lies of our society’s contemporary version of child sacrifice. It gets old, wears us down, and becomes obsolete, and God willing, will disappear.

**New**

What is it, then, that is new, that is fresh, that stays new? In our gospel reading, Our Lord goes up to the top of the mountain. The mountaintop is a place of encounter between God and man, and so it is a place of revelation. That is where Moses received the Law from the God of Israel. That is where Our Lord gave his Sermon on the Mount, the compendium of his moral teaching, beginning with the Beatitudes. So, he goes up to this mountaintop to reveal something to us.

He goes there to call his twelve closest followers – the Apostles – from among the disciples. The reading says that Jesus “appointed Twelve, whom he also named Apostles,” and here is the revelation of what stays new. He names them Apostles – for what? “That they might be with him,” and that “he might send them forth to preach,” and

“to have authority to drive out demons.” These are the three elements of the life of discipleship.

But notice what it begins with: he appointed Twelve that they might “*be* with him.” Just simply being with Jesus is the first principle of discipleship, that is, living in a state of grace, free from the old corruption of sin, living according to God’s plan, fulfilling God’s will in our life in accordance with our vocation. *This* is what never gets old – it gets hard sometimes, it is hard to keep going sometimes – but it never gets old. Jesus Christ is always alive and new and fresh. Being with him stays alive and new and fresh.

### **Sent on Mission**

This, we might say, is one of the two sides of the Christian life – the life of prayer or contemplation. Then there is the other side which, is the side of action. So, the call of all disciples has these two sides, of prayer and of contemplation – some disciples are called exclusively to that vocation – but also, for the rest of us, – which is almost all of us – contemplation in action. We might say these are the two sides to discipleship. But, the first place has to be given to the life of prayer, what we do has to come out of *being*, being with Jesus, coming out of our prayer.

The action flows from prayer. When Jesus went up to the mountain top, he called the Apostles to be with him, but then he sent them out on mission.

We see, then, that that mission also in itself is twofold – there are two parts to it. He sent them forth to preach – preaching the Gospel – and to have authority over demons – that is, confronting the reality of evil. This is the mission of Jesus, and so it is the mission of his Apostles; they were to share in his mission. The Apostles are the foundation of the Church, and so, by extension, it is the mission of the Church and of all disciples to share in this mission – proclaiming the Gospel and confronting the reality of evil. The Church extends the mission of Christ in world: preaching and teaching the Gospel, which is the truth of Christ, and confronting evil and healing by word and sacrament.

### **In Our Lives**

That is why we are here today, beginning with prayer, being with Jesus in prayer, begging his grace and his help for the protection of the unborn. The foundational right, the right of all rights, is the right to life, and we ask for the grace and strength to put this prayer of ours into action. This applies to all disciples, and to us too, here, today: our public witness is, in itself, preaching the Gospel.

The raw ugliness of evil is never so apparent in our land than in this horrendous crime of abortion – so much so, that our opponents in this debate insist that we turn away and not look at it. They realize that if we did look at it, we would see and acknowledge how ugly and evil it is. They deflect our attention from it. It is their way of wielding power over the weak and the vulnerable and profiting off of them.

But this gets old and obsolete. It has done tremendous damage in its wake, but it gets old and obsolete. Yes, we will face greater challenges going forward, but God's Truth will not be stifled.

Thank you. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for what you do to witness to the truth of the dignity of human life. Some of you, I know, have been doing this for some 50 years now. It seems like an uphill struggle the entire way, but I do believe the tide is changing. People are finally looking at the raw evil and ugliness of this horrendous crime.

### **Conclusion**

It is old, it is becoming obsolete, it has worn thin. We keep our masks on to protect life during this pandemic, but our opponents in this debate – their mask has come off, an unmasking that reveals the raw evil of the culture of death.

It is with the help of God's grace that can we live in the state of grace. That is why He chose to replace the Old Covenant with a new one. By the Old Covenant, the people could not justify themselves; he is the one – Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – who, by his death on the Cross, puts us in a right relationship with his Father and gives us the grace to live in a state of grace in this New Covenant that is eternal.

Let us then, my friends, seek always to be with him, so that we might do what he does.