In Gratitude for Life’s Goodness

The 22nd of January marks the 47th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision, Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion in all fifty states. We mourn this day. We mourn the lives that will never grace our nation. We mourn the mothers who will carry with them a deep longing for their children. We mourn the devastation abortion has brought to our understanding of life itself.

We long to tell the world that life is good. Life is so good that God Himself became one of us to give us the unmerited gift of more life—life with Him forever! We have seen that life is creative. Life creates small wonders and the greatest of marvels. Life is dynamic. A life can light ablaze a whole neighborhood, a whole nation. Life can’t help but shine.

The act of snuffing out this light is a grave loss for all, horrendous in its own right. But each time the pure pulse of life is stopped, it does something to the rest of us. Life—with its power and creativity and movement—stopped simply because it is life, can only cause breakdown. It must unleash ramifications in the family, the community, the nation, even the Church. The family is weakened, struck at its roots. The weak, the sick, the vulnerable all suffer exposure to exploitation. The healthy and strong are plagued by the delusion that life is meaningless.

“Never before in history has there been an attack against human beings only because they are alive. Life itself is under siege.” ~ John Cardinal O’Connor

And so we mourn.

On a busy afternoon shortly before Christmas, we bore witness to the tragedy of abortion through two women who arrived at our apostolic center at the same time. Each was a mother, but because of a choice, each was living a very different experience of motherhood.

First, Aliah, a woman whom we had been serving over the past few weeks, came to the door. Aliah had become pregnant in difficult circumstances. Her family and the baby’s father had put immense pressure on her to have an abortion. She had fought for the life of her child for weeks with all of the support we could give her, but in the end she could not withstand the insistence of her family. Tragically, she had an abortion a few weeks before Christmas. She was heartbroken; she was angry with those who had abandoned her, and filled with regret that she had not been able to hold out and protect her child. She desired to undo what was done—to make a different choice. Aliah came to our door because she needed a witness to the life that was lost. She needed to grieve—and not to grieve alone. She said, speaking of the baby’s father: “He wants to pretend that nothing had happened. He says someday we can have another child. But can he give me back this child? I feel so much emptiness. I know I have lost something precious.” So we cried with her—for her pain, her loss, her grief. We cried for the fact that abortion was even an option for this sweet, broken-hearted woman.

While we were meeting with Aliah, another woman, Jaylee, arrived. We had first met her almost two years earlier. Jaylee hadn’t wanted an abortion, but allowed a cousin to convince her that it was her
only option given her financial situation. As she rode the train to the clinic, she wrote a letter to God apologizing for what she was about to do and asking Him to stop her if He could. While she arrived at the clinic, she was told that an abortion was impossible because the baby’s placenta was covering the birth canal. As she was leaving the clinic, a sidewalk counselor approached Jaylee. He spoke words of encouragement and gave her the “other option” that she had longed for: he brought her to us. Her little girl, Dianna, was born during the Christmas season.

One year later, Jaylee was at our door. She told us, “This child is a burst of light in our family. I can’t imagine life without her.” She gave us a big hug and thanked us for our support. She asked if she could say thank you to God in our chapel for the gift of her daughter’s life. We brought her to the chapel and she knelt down in prayer before the tabernacle and prayed out loud a litany of gratitude. One by one, Jaylee listed every gift in her life — she found so much good in her life and she thanked God for it all. Here was Jaylee in prayer, full of gratitude, full of God, full of life.

And so close to each other, but in two different places, were Aliah and Jaylee. We were living the reality of the tragedy of abortion. Abortion took away one woman’s opportunity for the gratitude that new life brings and brought in its wake its absence—despair.

But as we mourn this anniversary, we hear Jesus say to us, “Blessed are those who mourn.” Through the power of the Cross, God intended to redeem even the tragedy of abortion. He cannot be outdone in generosity towards life, the very life He created. And so we ask you to join us in spirit or in person as we pray for our nation on January 22nd at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, in reparation for the sin of abortion, and for all of us who have been affected. We ask you to join us, as we imitate Jaylee’s prayer, in thanking God for the gift of life of those born and unborn, and as we petition God for the healing of every hurting heart like Aliah’s.