

Pulled Quote: “We are all children of God, no matter how small, and no matter how weak. When we lose sight of the sovereignty of God, we tend to make ourselves gods, and we exercise power for self-interest and convenience.” –Bishop John Folda

Headline: Signs of life

I am heartened by recent legislation that was passed in the North Dakota legislature. Our lawmakers rightly prohibited an abortion procedure that involves dismemberment of the unborn child. Any abortion procedure is unthinkable, but this procedure is especially gruesome, and I’m glad the leaders of North Dakota were able to see that. Another new law requires giving information to mothers about the option to reverse a chemical abortion that is already underway. One would assume that mothers have a right to such information, but the abortion supporters objected strenuously. It would seem that they want to achieve an abortion at all costs, even when a mother has had a change of heart. Fortunately, our lawmakers exercised common sense and allowed mothers to receive as much information as possible about the decision that they are making.

The news around our nation isn’t all so good. In the state legislature of New York, a new law was passed that removes any obstacle to abortion through all nine months of pregnancy, even up to the moment of birth when any reasonable person would admit that a child feels pain. When the final vote was announced, the legislative chamber erupted in cheers from those who supported the bill. The governor of that state acclaimed this new success of the culture of death and dismissed the outcry of defenders of life. It should be pointed out that current court rulings already allow nearly unlimited abortion on demand, but the jubilation at this legislative vote was remarkable and chilling. Similar bills are in the works in Vermont and Rhode Island as well.

Even more disturbing is the attitude toward so-called “botched” abortions. When asked about new pro-abortion legislation in his state, the governor of Virginia, a pediatric neurosurgeon, matter-of-factly described what should happen if an abortion procedure led to the live birth of a child. His chilling words left no doubt that the living child would be allowed to die. In most civilized societies we call this infanticide, and this is similar to what landed the notorious Dr. Kermit Gosnell in jail a few years ago. Frankly, I’m stunned that so little attention was paid to the governor’s apparent acceptance of infanticide, not to mention the failure of the media to call it what it is.

What underlies this new effort to entrench unrestricted abortion into the fabric of our national culture? I believe part of the reason is fear, even panic. Those who demand acceptance of abortion are panicked over statutes enacted in some states that put reasonable limits on the freedom to abort a child. Pro-abortion campaigners are also distressed at the growing percentage of Americans who believe there should be limits on the right to end the life of an unborn child, much less a child who is already born. Survey after survey shows that a majority of Americans are still deeply uncomfortable with the wide-open availability of abortion and believe that restrictions are appropriate. The pro-abortion side can also see that the pro-life movement is young and getting younger. Teens and young adults are not falling into line with the so-called pro-choice movement. They are smart enough to recognize that the baby in the womb is a baby, a child, a human person already alive and waiting to enter this world. They understand the science, and they are not taken in by the rhetoric of choice.

The bigger issue is a grossly exaggerated understanding of autonomy: choice and self-determination trample every other right, even the right to life itself. Our culture has become so enthralled with the autonomous self that every choice is considered permissible, even the choice to end a child’s life. It’s ironic that we decry the moral blindness that allowed slavery, but at the same time we are unable to recognize the humanity of an unborn child, even one with a beating heart. Choice has become a demi-god, and our culture bows to it no matter the stakes.

The most important reason of all is a failure to acknowledge God as the author of all life: my life, your life, the life of an unborn child, the life of a disabled adult, the life of an elderly person with dementia, every human life. We are all children of God, no matter how small, and no matter how weak.

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Other states have also enacted laws to put limits on the practice of abortion. Unfortunately, many of those laws, like some of ours here at home, have been overturned by courts that disregard the right of the child and the right of citizens to take reasonable measures to protect life. In the face of these events, those who still believe in the sanctity of life must stay the course and not grow discouraged. I won't be surprised if attempts are made to overturn the new laws in North Dakota, but whatever the outcome is, our determination to keep working for life must remain firm and rooted in hope. In fact, I can't thank enough the many people who faithfully pray and witness for life at the Fargo abortion facility, as well as the many people in our diocese who help women through their pregnancies and then support them after the birth of their babies.

A recent film called *Unplanned* tells the story of Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood clinic director who has now become a fervent pro-life advocate. Her example and activism, as well as the film about her life and conversion, have led many people to change their views on the life of the unborn child. I've heard that a growing number of abortion practitioners are following her example and walking away from the abortion industry.

Despite the heartbreaking news in some parts of the country, there are encouraging signs of life in our culture, indications that more and more people are coming around to the Gospel of Life. Let us continue to pray for the conversion of hearts and the conversion of our nation. During this month dedicated to her, let us ask our Blessed Mother, who carried the Son of God in her womb, to intercede for us and lead us always toward the fullness of life in Christ.