

Six months before the birth of Jesus, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist. We are reminded by the readings that every life is precious in the eyes of God. Every life matters and every life has a hidden vocation, a calling to proclaim the goodness of the Lord that may even begin from within the womb.

We live in a society that often fails to respect the dignity of human life and wishes to silence the voice of a child within the womb. Less than two weeks from now, we will celebrate the 4th of July. Historically, we recall the Declaration of Independence from 1776. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

God is the author of life. No king in England can take it upon himself to take away the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Twenty-one years later in Convention by the unanimous consent of the States present the 17th Day of September in the Year of our Lord 1787, the framers of the constitution still believed the right to life was unalienable. This is why the right to life was never a part of the US Constitution from the outset.

Like Zechariah in the temple who could not accept the message of an angel, many in society do not believe the right to life is unalienable. They feel the rights of others should supersede that of a child with no voice of its own.

History teaches us that the founding documents of the United States spoke of lofty ideals that took many generations to bear their truthful fruit. The unalienable rights of slaves were trampled upon. President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation advanced their freedom but did not end prejudice and subsequent laws that tried to subvert that freedom. In August of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr gave his famous “I have a dream” speech to advance the cause of Black Americans who continued to suffer “the searing flames of injustice 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.”

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the [Negro] people a bad check, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.”

King’s speech helped to change hearts and minds and in time laws were passed advancing greater equality for people of all colors. Quite sadly, a disproportionate number of abortions still take away the unalienable right to life of Black Americans in the womb. We continue to pray for positive change in our society and for the promise of the Declaration of Independence to bear its full fruit.

In the Gospel of Life, Pope John Paul II offered his own dream and vision for the unborn by referring to the author of our unalienable rights:

Human life is sacred and inviolable at every moment of existence, including the initial phase which precedes birth. All human beings, from their mothers’ womb, belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the ‘book of life’ (Evangelium Vitae #61).

Zechariah lost his voice for nine months to help him more fully appreciate God’s plan for his son John. Let us use our voices to proclaim the Gospel of Life that our flawed nation may more fully appreciate the gift of life and God’s dream that the unalienable right to life be truly honored.