

January 22, 2020 6:00 p.m. St. Monica Parish (due to Cathedral renovation)

Diocesan Mass in observance of 47th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Decision: Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

My brother priests, my sisters and brothers in Christ! I'm very happy to welcome all of you here to St. Monica Parish on this frigid, dark and snowy January evening, I'm really glad that we're all here together; but I wish we weren't. At least, I wish we weren't here for the reason that we are.

But here we are, on another January 22nd, to commemorate that infamous Supreme Court decision known simply as "Roe v. Wade", which signifies so much. January 22, 1973----the date 47 years ago today---when the Supreme Court issued its decision on that Case, the world changed----or at least our country changed. "Roe v. Wade" legalized abortion, the killing of an unborn baby in his/her mother's womb. "Roe v. Wade" represents our society's choice to create what we have clearly come to see is a "Culture of Death". "Roe v. Wade" is a shorthand way of saying that we have witnessed the deaths of nearly 60 million babies since 1973-----about 1.2 million babies each year---that's 3,500 babies a day.

And so, every January 22nd, we come together to pray. The Catholic Church here in the United States has designated this day in our Liturgical Calendar as a "Day of Prayer and Repentance", and urges us to make this a day for our own fasting and sacrificing in reparation for the sins of those who have had abortions, for those complicit in the performing of abortions, and for our country for protecting such a violent act in our code of law. Besides coming together to somberly observe this occasion once a year, most of us spend much of our time and energy throughout the year, devote much of our prayer and sacrifice each day, and are engaged in regular, ongoing activities of trying to protect the lives of the most precious and vulnerable in our society---babies in the wombs of their mothers.

We're grateful that President Trump has again this year declared this day to be "National Sanctity of Human Life Day", and that in the proclamation he signed earlier this week, he wrote that "our Nation proudly and strongly reaffirms our commitment to protect the precious gift of life at every stage, from conception to natural death". And further that Statement reads: "Every person---the born and unborn, the poor, the downcast, the disabled, the infirm, and the elderly---has inherent value." And finally the Statement concluded that our country: "must

remain steadfastly dedicated to the profound truth that all life is a gift from God, Who endows every person with immeasurable worth and potential.”

There has been some progress in moving our country forward to a more Pro-Life stance, and there is some reason to hope that in the not too distant future, we may actually see “Roe v. Wade” overturned. The national statistics show a slight decline in the number of abortions in certain age groups; unfortunately the latest statistics available for the nine counties that comprise our Diocese show that in six of the nine counties, there has actually been a slight increase in the number of abortions performed, with Allegan, Barry and Calhoun Counties seeing a slight decrease. Sadly, here in Kalamazoo County, the number went from 604 abortions in 2017 to 665 in 2018 (the latest year for which we have data).

But in the meantime, we come together on this January 22nd to pray, to sacrifice, to repent, and to renew our own commitment to keep giving witness to, and working for the restoration of the dignity of all human life, especially those in the womb.

All of God’s Word promotes the sacredness of human life, and communicates God’s unconditional love for all human beings---those He has created to be His precious daughters and sons. God has a particular plan for each person He has created in His own image and likeness, as we heard Isaiah the Prophet remind us in this evening’s First Reading: *“The Lord called me from birth, from my mother’s womb He gave me my name.....He formed me as His servant from the womb.”* But even then, Isaiah tells us that our God wants us to be more than servants, when He adds: *“It is too little for you to be My servant; I will make you a light to the nations.”* Our God loves us from all eternity; our God loves us into existence; our God loves us for the unique and special individual we are; our God loves us not for anything we do, but just for who we are!

If you may allow me to share a personal anecdote, when I was back in Pittsburgh to celebrate Christmas a few weeks ago with my family (which is already quite large, with 48 of us gathered for dinner: siblings, spouses, nieces/nephews, and great nieces and nephews), two of my nieces used the occasion to announce that they were pregnant: Sheryl with her first child; and Stephanie with her 2nd child (who has since learned that this 2nd pregnancy is TWINS!). They were both thrilled, and all of us rejoiced with them. And those little unborn babies are already precious and loved members of our family.

Sadly, that's not always the case. And in those situations when, in spite of the fact that God loved them into existence, their own mother decides that she can't afford, or doesn't have the wherewithal, or just doesn't want to have this child---when there is no Joy about this child's life----that child can be killed. And nearly 60 million times, that is what has happened.

At our Ecumenical Prayer Service this past Saturday, our own Dr. Robin Pierruci was our speaker. She spoke eloquently, passionately, and scientifically about the uniqueness of every child. She stated that every child's DNA---a human being's most basic "identifier"---is set at conception. She also went on to say that each child in their mother's womb is indeed a human being, loved by God, and with a right to life, even if the mother does not want that child. As Dr. Robin said so beautifully: "A child's wanted-ness does not in any way lessen that child's human-ness".

In this evening's Gospel, we heard the Apostles discussing "*Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?*" In response, "*Jesus called a child over, placed the child in their midst, and said: 'Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'*" Jesus tells ALL of us that we need "*to turn and become like children*" or we won't be able to even get into the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, if we don't see all of Life, and treat the gift of Life, the way God intends us to do----to accept the gift with joy, to treat the gift with reverence and respect, and to protect that gift in every way possible---then we need "*to turn*"----to convert----to change our hearts.

That's why we're here on this wintry January evening. And that's why nearly 200 of our young people and adults----from Hackett Catholic Prep, Lake Michigan Catholic, St. Joseph/St. Philip's in Battle Creek, St. Mary, Bronson and Holy Angels, Sturgis---- have traveled to Washington, D.C. for the Annual March for Life which is being held on Friday of this week.

We're here, and they're there, not to advance a political agenda, make a social statement, or support a particular party platform. We're here/they're there because we're Catholics---because we're followers of Jesus, the Lord of all Life. We're here/they're there because our God loves us unconditionally, and sent His Son Jesus to be born---in the exact same way every baby grows and develops in their mother's wombs---to bring us salvation. We're here/they're there because Jesus died to save us from this awful hold that sin has on our human hearts and on our finite world; Jesus' redemption has disclosed the deceptiveness of Evil that

tries to convince us that it's not really wrong to kill a baby in their own mother's wombs by denying that the baby is really human! How can we be so blind!

As Pope Francis wrote so beautifully: "We need to renew a lively awareness of God's passion for humanity and its world. Human beings are made by God '*in His image, male and female*' (Gn.1:27)...In our time, the Church is called once more to propose the human-ness of the life that bursts forth from God's passion for human beings. Our commitment to valuing, supporting, and defending the life of every human being is ultimately motivated by God's unconditional Love." (Letter to the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, January 6, 2019) [found in Meditation for the day in the current issue of ***Magnificat***]

And so on this Day of Prayer and Sacrifice in light of the sins of abortion, we also give thanks to God for His amazing, unconditional Life, and we renew our commitment to continue doing everything we can to protect and defend human life. We will keep doing that until "Roe v. Wade" will be a reference to something sad that had happened in the past, and when all that it signifies will be replaced with a love of and a respect for all human life.

Until then, we will be keep praying for as many more January 22nd anniversaries as it takes; when we no longer choose death; when we will always Choose Life.

God bless you, now and always!