

St. Thomas the Apostle - Respect Life Weekend – January 21-22, 2023

Respect Life Homily – Rev. Peter Infanger

Focus of homily – Be merciful face of God

As you know this past year was big for Respect Life.

The Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade that legalized abortion half a century ago.

Less noticed but very important is the continuing reduction in teen pregnancies. Births per 1000 women aged 15-19 has been consistently declining from a high of 96 in the 1950's to 16 today.

It is important that we praise God as well as thank all those who have worked hard to achieve this victory.

However, the battle for life is not over. The battle has now moved from the national level to the state level.

And so in honor of the day of prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, I am going to read excerpts from Cardinal Seán O'Malley's Pro-Life Homily of January 23, 2020.

(pause)

"Life is sacred. God is the author of life, not us. We are not god.

Life must be protected, nurtured, respected from conception to natural death.

The Gospel of Life is the centerpiece of the Church's social teaching.

Without life all other rights *do not matter!*

When the value of life is compromised or diminished, all life is at risk. When we give the State the power to determine which human beings are worthy

of living and which should be eliminated, what we are doing is opening a Pandora's Box that unleashes every kind of injustice and violation of human dignity and jeopardizes the very meaning of coexistence.

Rather than societies of people living together, we create a society where people are rejected, marginalized, uprooted and oppressed.

The Church's consistent life ethic from conception to natural death contrasts with the incoherent proclamation of human rights that fails to protect life when it is most vulnerable."

(pause)

However, the issue is that no one aspires to an abortion. No one wakes up one morning and says my life is not complete until I have an abortion. Abortion is the outcome of other decisions, choices, and issues.

The contributing factor for abortion is a crisis pregnancy. The factors that contribute to a crisis pregnancy include:

- The misunderstanding of true love, self-gratification versus self-sacrifice for the other
- Premarital sex
- Poverty
- Poor education
- Youth
- lack of support
- pressure by family and boyfriends to terminate the pregnancy

(pause)

Pope Francis he laments the fact that we have not done enough to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations.

"The Good News is that God never gives up on us. He never tires of loving us. He never tires of forgiving us, never tires of giving us another chance.

The Pro-Life Movement needs to be the merciful face of God to women facing a difficult pregnancy. Being judgmental or condemnatory is not part of the Gospel of Life.

The gospel story of the encounter of Jesus with the woman caught in adultery is one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament. The Pharisees are determined to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Should the woman be punished by death as the law demanded? If Jesus said "no" they would accuse him of neglecting to obey the law. If Jesus said "yes, kill her", He would turn people against Him for having the woman killed.

The feelings of the woman in the Gospel must be like the young woman caught in a crisis situation of an unwanted pregnancy. She feels overwhelmed, alone, afraid, confused.

We must never allow that woman to perceive the Pro-Life movement as a bunch of angry self-righteous Pharisees with stones in their hands, looking down on her and judging her.

We want the woman to experience the merciful love of Christ. Jesus does not condone the woman's fall, but He does not condemn her. He invites her to make a new start, to know that she is forgiven and loved.

Pope Francis urges us to practice "the art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground **of the other**, in this case, the woman in crisis.

This accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze, which heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian Life. This is precisely what the Sisters of Life, Project Rachel and the many Pro-Life ministries are doing.

The truth is that we can save babies only by saving the Mothers. When they experience God's loving mercy in a community that cares about them,

then they will become capable of showing mercy to their children. **The Pro-Life Movement has to be about saving Mothers. We need to focus on the women to try to understand what they are suffering.**

The majority of women who succumb to abortion are poor. Poverty is a dehumanizing force that leads people to feel trapped and to make this horrible choice. The Gospel of Life demands that we work for economic justice in our country and in our world.

We can rescue unborn babies from abortion by rescuing their mothers from a life of poverty and hopelessness. Pope Francis challenges us to do more.

So, what can we do to help mothers?

(pause)

I'm going to mention three ministries that I ask you to consider supporting or becoming involved with.

Respect Life Opportunities:

1. *Saint Thomas the Apostle Respect Life Ministry*
2. *Project Love*
3. *Waterleaf Women's Center in Aurora*

See Bulletin insert or Eileen McGleam for more information

- **First - Saint Thomas the Apostle Respect Life Ministry.** Programs include
 - the Christmas swaddling project where diapers wipes baby clothes toiletries and gift cards are collected for local pregnancy centers.
 - Project love Mother's Day and Father's Day cards for free will offering for Project Love

- Letters to legislators
- Praying at local abortion clinics especially carrying 40 days for life and more.
- **Second – Project Love**
 - Eileen McGleam is a St Thomas parishioner, the Respect Life facilitator and also the founder and director of Project Love. Project Love is a grant program of Illinois Right to Life. For 26 years, they have been providing financial support to pregnant women and new mothers all over Illinois. They have given over 1500 grants in that time, all of the money coming from private donors. The applicants are referred to us by pregnancy centers and other social service agencies. If the women are qualified, we send a check to help with rent, utility bills or other urgent expenses.
- **Third - Waterleaf Women's Center in Aurora**
 - Free pregnancy resources including counseling and ultrasounds, STD testing and more to women considering abortion

Respect Life encompasses more than the beginning of life. It also includes suicide especially teen suicides, gun violence, capital punishment and euthanasia. We have opportunities to make a difference in these areas too. Reach out to Mike Ryder or the Social Justice office for more details.

So this week let us ask ourselves how can we **build a just society that will be safer for the poor, the struggling, the unborn and those on the margins. Please see today's bulletin insert for more details.**