

## **Nearly 50 years after Roe v. Wade, We Must Never Give up the Fight for Life**

Among the many amazing people I've met here at Saint Joe's have been those involved in Pro-Life Ministry. We have a very active group striving to educate people on the sanctity of human life, that helps people remember what an important issue this is, and also have helped people make decisions that have saved lives.

This Thursday marks the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, gives us a reminder of the need to speak up for the defenseless. The fact of the matter is, the Church continues to speak out tirelessly on this issue, and we must act as well whether we are in a group or not. So how can we as Catholics make sure this issue is something we take seriously?

For one, we use the word "justice" a lot these days; some see it in the legal term, others see it more in the social term of assisting others through charitable acts. Ending the life of an unborn child covers both. A person has a right to life, and this life is sacred. Time and time again, Christ preaches and speaks out against injustice, which ultimately are to "undo the works of the devil" which are lies and murder – something that the "family planning" industry quietly does on a daily basis, lying to a woman before hurting her and taking her unborn child. Social justice is a life issue in that we argue for social justice based on the dignity of the human person, something abortion denies.

That is why it is so important for you and I to speak up. There are numerous ways we can get involved.

One is by educating ourselves and passing this information onto others. Someone told me if you ask any parent who sees an ultrasound of their unborn child, its hard to conceive how someone could then go on to not have the child. While many in the world would call an unborn child not life but potential life, consider how much development occurs in just the initial weeks and months: blood flow by the fourth to fifth week; heart development between 18 and 25 days, and fingers and toes by the sixth week. Its understandable in that during the initial weeks when one can't see someone as being pregnant one might think that there is no life present – but indeed, we have a human being, and so many just aren't aware of all that happens in the first moments of life. Our job as evangelists for Christ is to educate ourselves and others about this truth, and also to be aware of the numerous resources that are available help people chose life. Statistics do show that more people are not choosing to end their pregnancy before birth, and some feel this may be in part to those who are involved in the pro-life movement setting up centers near clinics that give women resources and help. I truly believe they make a difference. For instance, take Kathy Freed, a local woman who was featured in the Catholic Spirit a few years ago. She's saved hundreds of lives, not including the lives who are impacted by the decision. Indeed Freed might not have changed the law, but she has helped save lives. Knowing this information, when people say things such as "I'm personally against abortion but would not feel comfortable telling others what to do" or "there's no real baby that early in the womb," we can engage in conversation and get people thinking. It can certainly be a controversial topic, but when we use facts to bolster arguments it can really change hearts.

Secondly, forgiveness and compassion for those who have been impacted by choosing abortion. It's what we preach as a Church, and it's what we must live out. The Church is there to help women and those affected by abortion offering not just forgiveness through the sacraments, but also to help people find the resources they need to heal. The sad thing is so many women feel the guilt set in. Some have felt pressured to have an abortion because of the attitude of family. Many other women simply have the abortion while other friends and family members never speak up or reach out to help, or let the time pass without reaching out to ease the woman's pain, but simply let the wounds grow with silence or, even worse, use it to harm the person. We have to strive to reach out to help those who were hurt by abortion, by taking the time to talk with them when they seek our help. We should also pray both for the victims of abortion, but also for those involved in the killing of unborn children.

Third, we need to get involved. There's a big danger that as we mark 48 years now since the decision that we might think there is nothing we can do, or that abortion is somehow a matter for the courts. Some might be demoralized by the outcome of the elections this year, and think there's nothing to be done until two or four years from now. But that's hardly the case. As I noted at the start of the article, we have an amazing Pro Life group here at Saint Joe's, consider joining them. Yes, the elections are over this cycle, but the legislative session is underway and in Minnesota, we have divided government. Our legislators can greatly effect abortion. For instance, there was the Minnesota Women's Right to Know Law, a great bill. It means that before a woman has an abortion, she be made aware of its risks and alternatives. This bill was passed in 2003, but it didn't happen overnight. It took ten years of people working hard to put pressure on legislators for that bill to be passed and signed into law. That's just one example of how the people we vote for can help to save lives, and when we speak up for life, they have to listen to us. Stay up to date on what the legislature is doing as it goes into session. Know where judges stand on the issue when they are nominated. And consider joining parishioners when they pray and give witness outside of Planned Parenthood in Saint Paul, as our parish and many others make several trips a year there.

And finally, we have to be vigilant and be on guard to avoid apathy. Abortion has been legal my entire life in the United States, and in the current campaigns, it doesn't come up much which is understandable as most candidates are advised not to address it at length. And many might be tempted to think nothing will ever change. Many people thought that way about racism, but thanks to the efforts of individuals like Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Dr. Martin Luther King, institutional racism began to change in this country, even if shadows of individual racism still remain. For a time in our nations history, slavery was legal in half of the nation. And many didn't like that, but didn't want to get involved in the issue because they didn't feel it was their place to do anything about it or inflict their views on others. But yet our Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal, endowed with the Creator with certain unalienable rights; there is no asterisk next to that word "all." It took tireless efforts to change attitudes and laws, but eventually it happened. Perhaps we may be tempted to think nothing will ever change, but may we remember those words from Matthew's Gospel that are a Divine guarantee to the Church: "The gates of hell will not prevail against it." A gate doesn't attack though; it defends the city. We as the Church storm the gates of evil. It is our job as Christians to storm the gates of falsehood and lies that claim only certain lives or certain people are sacred, and to truly be the light of truth to a world that needs to see that truth and hear it proclaimed.

That might not mean carrying a picket sign, but believe it or not we do just that when we pray for those affected by abortion; when we pray for the abortionist; when we forgive and reach out to those who are hurting because of abortion, or when we write our legislators urging them to support pro-life legislation. Good things have happened; as I noted the women's "Right to Know" law here in Minnesota; and last week the last abortion clinic in Missouri was closed. And, in recent years, the makeup of the US Supreme Court has changed. There is hope!

Some say they would never chose an abortion but don't want to inflict their morality on others. Sadly, its indicative of a larger problem our society faces called moral relativism. In life, there are moral absolutes, right and wrong, and the sanctity of life is one of them. Let us take that seriously. As Christians, may we never give up the fight for life, and be vigilant in seeing abortion laws and the attitudes of some in society not as something that will never change, or seeing those who are in favor of abortion as the enemy, but rather through prayer, action, compassion and dialogue remember we have so much power to save lives and change hearts.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul