

49 years after Roe v. Wade, Hope Shines Through

This upcoming Saturday marks the 49th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, and for the first time in years, hope is really on the horizon in terms of changes to laws with a big Supreme Court ruling coming up. But hope has been something people involved in the pro life movement have been doing since that fateful day nearly 50 years ago. Millions of lives have been lost, but so many have been saved too. So how can we be people of hope who help changes minds and hearts on this issue, while helping to safeguard human life?

One is by educating ourselves. Someone told me if you ask any parent who sees an ultrasound of their unborn child, its hard to fathom 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.

We also need to apply our faith to how we vote on this issue. There's a big danger that as we mark 49 years now since the decision that we might think there is nothing we can do. But as we enter into a year with big elections for Congress and State elected officials, we should can't divorce our politics and faith.

As an issue, abortion is unique. In the introductory letter for the September, 2019 United States Conference of Catholic bishop's document from 2015 called "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," a key word is used: "preeminent." The specific sentence says "The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed." This letter says we should not ignore racism, environmental concerns, poverty and the death penalty, but, according to Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, he notes our bishops give priority to defending the most basic right, the right to live.

Abortion is unique in that it ends a life when a person is the most vulnerable and most in need of protection. It is intrinsically evil as well, meaning it is never justified or morally permissible. (Even in cases of where the mother's life is in danger, it is known as the principle of "double effect" morally; meaning one can certainly act to save the life of a mother, but the abortion is the secondary outcome of that, meaning a procedure is not being done to end the pregnancy but to save a life, that of a mother, which is of course permissible).

We also have to consider how many people are murdered because of abortion. It is a staggering number - 2,000 children per day. That's about 61 million dead since 1973 because of this. As such, comparing it to capital punishment, 11 people were executed last year. As such, abortion is killing exponentially more people, in addition to the unborn being far more vulnerable, and a death row inmate having a trial and being guilty of a very serious crime. This does not mean we

support the death penalty as Catholics, but it is to say that abortion is impacting a greater number of people, and of course an unborn child is certainly completely innocent. Additionally, immigration, hunger and poverty do indeed matter - but individually none of these issues come anywhere close to resulting in the number of deaths as abortion. These are also issues where the particular position of a candidate is more gray. It's clear if a candidate supports abortion being legal. But the specifics of an immigration policy, or policy on poverty are often lacking specifics too, and you can find pros and cons from multiple people running across parties on them.

Also, while abortion is unique, we have also been given some guidance on issues closely related to it. In 2006 Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI identified some "principles which are not negotiable" in politics. Specifically these include protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death.

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 many might be tempted to think nothing will ever change. But this past fall, the Supreme Court has heard arguments on abortion, and many have argued that big changes may be on the horizon to *Roe v. Wade*; perhaps the ruling finally being overturned. Numerous states have "trigger" laws were this to happen making abortion illegal in their state. With big elections this upcoming fall here, this issue will be front and center this campaign season. The key is we can't give up and say "this will always be how things are." 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 - and people work continually to combat that. 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. May we be vigilant!

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