Silence is not an Option on Life Issues

Starting later this month, through the support of the Knights of Columbus and our Respect Life Committee, our parish will be hosting the traveling Memorial to the Innocents.

This is a memorial that originated at the Church of Saint Patrick in Oak Gove and coincides with October which is “Respect Life Month.”

The unfortunate truth is that millions of lives have been lost to abortion; over 3,000 every day.

The Pro-Life group at Saint Patrick felt people had become de-sensitized to these numbers and stats, so they wanted to make a difference. As such, they created the Memorial to the Innocents. The memorial consists of a number of crosses, placed in rows on parish property, inviting people to think about the impacts of abortion, in addition to how it impacts those involved in the decision. The babies of course are not the only victims; abortion is devastating to mothers and fathers as well.

Before the Memorial was created, the committee up at Saint Patrick reached out to *Rachel’s Vineyard* Retreat Alumni, *Rachel’s Vineyard* being a retreat for healing for those who have gone through an abortion but are seeking peace and mercy. They asked them, would creating this memorial cause too much pain, or be offensive? Overwhelmingly the response supported this and wanted to stress how it is important to communicate to as many as possible that there are human beings being lost every day. The committee received great feedback from their own parishioners as well; many parents came up to the people on the committee and said their teens asked what is it about; it served as a teaching opportunity to respect life from conception to natural death.

With the impact this memorial had on people in their parish and local community, Saint Patrick has made this memorial available to other parishes as well, a great opportunity for education. When our Respect Life Committee learned of this, it was decided this would be a great opportunity to have at our parish. We have had it displayed before, and it is a powerful evangelization tool.

There can be no doubt that abortion is a hot political issue; some are making it the forefront of the election season. And tragically, there is a lot of manipulation with the issue. Those promoting it use more friendly words such as “health choice” or “reproductive freedom,” but never speak of the development of the unborn child; the impact this has on people, or the pain that happens afterwards. Much like with other scandals such as abuse, alcoholism, or violence in a family, the not-so-subtle message is if you are “pro-life” keep your mouth shut, because it’s “none of your business.” The same thing has been said with respect to racism and bigotry and slavery. History is full of moral evils being allowed to continue because people felt they should be silent. In

fact, the memorial has not even been put out yet, and I have already received an email from a person saying it is a bad idea and very “unwelcoming.”

Note, however, the Christian is meant to change the world. Jesus tells us we will be persecuted for our faith and be hated at times because of Him. How true this is. But as we all know, at times the person who hates our message the most only comes around because someone evangelized to them. Many a parent knows this as their child goes through changes in life.

We have a moral obligation to speak out on truth and mercy. This is why as a Church, we preach forgiveness through such organizations as *Rachel’s Vineyard* and always invite someone who has made a bad choice to know they are loved by God.

But we also need to speak out for those without a voice and to testify to the truth. It is why at the end of the Mass we are told to “go” and announce the Gospel or glorify the Lord by our lives. We go forth to proclaim what we profess at Mass; we go forth to bring Jesus into the world. This is much more than saying “God loves you”; it is articulating what that love means and how to respond to it. In a culture that so often re-defines truth and morality, we are meant to point people to a better way. And what one finds is when you get past the emotion, and have an actual discussion or argument with someone and show to them the development of the unborn child even at an early age; or present them with the testimonies of people who have become pro-life or changed their mind when they were about to make a tragic choice, or explain to them how the so-called “pro-choice” movement through organizations like Planned Parenthood target and exploit women who are considering abortion you can change minds and hearts. Countless people are walking the earth now because people were not silent, because they were helped to understand the truth. And so many have also changed their minds and hearts because the silence was finally broken.

I’d like to thank all involved in making the Memorial of the Innocents a reality. And while some may bristle that it is “political” in an election year, this isn’t about a political party or candidate; it’s about moral right and wrong; a dogma of our faith; and about changing minds and hearts. I have no doubt that as people walk by, or just look at it, they will think more deeply and while at first amongst some there may be anger or indifference, truly it is reaching hearts and minds. The key is to not give up and to persevere. Change does not come overnight, but can only happen when we do not remain silent and do not back down in testifying to the truth - so let us do just that, reminding people of the truth of God’s mercy, and of the value of every human life, born and unborn.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul