

January 22, 2021

6:00 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life

(Gen.1:1-2:2; 1 Jn.3:11-21; Lk.1:39-56)

This truly has been an historic week, and thanks be to God, also a week without much further violence. On Monday, as we observed the National Holiday celebrating the life and legacy of the Rev./Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we prayed for an end to racism. In these days from January 18 until Monday, January 25th, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, we continue to pray for an end to the division within the Body of Christ and a positive response to Jesus' own prayer: "*that they/we all may be one*". On Wednesday we fervently prayed for a peaceful transfer of leadership from the administration of the 45th President to that of the 46th. While we are grateful that there was no violence as was feared during those ceremonies, sadly there have been riots, violence and looting in some parts of the country by extremists who seem committed only to destruction.

However what we observe today brings to our minds and hearts the ongoing and unending violence, perpetrated against the most innocent and completely vulnerable of all human beings---unborn babies in their mothers' wombs. Based only on the mother's choice, and with the full support of the laws of our country and the blessing of our government, any unborn child's life can be violently ended at any point in their most vulnerable first 9 months of life, for any reason. That is why the Church here in the United States calls us to a "Day" with one of the longest, and saddest, titles in the Liturgical Year: "*A Day of Prayer for the Full Restoration of the Legal Guarantee for the Right to Life, AND a Day of Penance for Violations to the Dignity of the Human Person Committed through Acts of Abortion*".

In other words, this is a Day of Prayer and Penance. We are to pray for what no civilized society should ever have to pray for---to have the right to life; and we are to fast and do penance in reparation for the more than 60 million babies whose lives have been ended throughout these 48 years since the *Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Decision* in 1973, **and** for those who have perpetrated those violations to the dignity of the human person embodied in each of those precious children. While we hope that our Society will soon find ways for us to live together in peace, in harmony, with racial equality, and to eventually restore unity within the Body of Christ, we must continue to pray and do penance for an

end to abortion, and for a restoration of respect and dignity for all human lives, from the first moment of conception until the last moment of natural breath, and at every point along the spectrum of the precious gift of human life.

Life is amazing----wondrous----incredibly complex----beautiful----strong in so many ways, but also oh so fragile. There is no more powerful account of Life than the account from God Himself----the Author of all Life---in the first verses of the first chapter of the first book of God's Holy Word---which we heard as our First Reading this evening. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created the world methodically, incrementally, over 6 "days". As we all know, those are "Biblical" days, not our own measure of 24-hour/days. For God, *Time* takes on a whole different meaning than it does for us. As Psalm 90 tells us: "*A thousand years in Your sight are as yesterday, now that it is passed, or as a watch of the night.*" (Ps. 90:4)

The first words we hear in that Reading are: "*In the beginning, when God created the Heavens and the Earth.....*"---there was NOTHING!----"*all the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss*". But then God's Creative Hand began, first with establishing "order" out of the "chaos"; then creating Light to dispel the Darkness----that was the First "Day". Then, on the second, third and fourth "days", God brought about greater order in the universe by establishing Days and Nights, and separating the Land and the Sea; followed by the creation of the Sun, Moon, Stars---the infinitely vast universe---and the order that was established in years, seasons, and days. It wasn't until the Fifth and Sixth "Days" that life was created, first with vegetation, and plants and fruits; then with living creatures in the sea and on land and in the sky-----and God saw ALL of it---and it was very good!

God had created all these amazing realities. But even though it was all very good, there was still something missing. That's when God created His masterpiece---the human person----as He said: "*In our image, and after our likeness---male and female He created them.*" And God blessed them, and gave them dominion over creation, not to abuse it, but to care for it---cherish it----respect it---treat all creation with love, and to value every human being with the dignity given by God, our Creator. Then, Creation was complete, and God took a well-deserved "rest" on the Seventh Day.

On this solemn Day---the Day of Prayer and Penance--- we need to remember that only God has control over creation. We humans are rational beings with

great intelligence; we have amazing gifts, we've learned so much over these many generations of human history. But at the end of the "Day", we are "creatures", not The Creator; we are stewards of creation, not the Lords; we are responsible to care for creation, not to destroy it. And although we have been made cooperators with God in the act of creating other human beings, no human being should ever destroy life---certainly not human life.

And yet, as St. John reminded us in this evening's Second Reading, it only took until the second generation of human beings for that to happen; when Cain killed his brother Abel in a fit of jealous rage. As St. John wrote: "*Cain belonged to the Evil One and slaughtered his brother....because his own works were evil and those of his brother, righteous.*" And sadly, in every generation since the Second Generation, brother has killed brother, always for the same reason: because their hearts are poisoned by the Evil One.

Jesus has come into our world to directly confront the Evil One and to free us from the power that can poison our hearts and deceive us into thinking that WE are God. Jesus HAS defeated that Evil One, as St. John said, "*by laying down His Life for us.*" That is how we come to know Jesus, Who is Love; and that is how others come to know who we are: by also being willing to "*lay our lives down for our brothers*" and to "*love one another, not just in word or in speech, but in deed and in truth.*"

And this evening's Gospel gives us the perfect example of what that means. While our dear Blessed Mother, newly-pregnant with the Word of God made Flesh in her womb, knowing that her older cousin Elizabeth was pregnant and would need help, thought nothing of traveling close to 100 miles from Nazareth to Judea to help her, not just for an hour, or an overnight, or a long weekend, but for as long as it took---until the one who "leaped for joy" in Elizabeth's womb, John (who would become known as the Baptist), would be born. That's *loving in deed and in truth!* Those two "unborn Babies" in their mother's wombs are no different than any "unborn baby" in his/her mother's wombs, waiting for the moment they can "leap for joy" when they are born into the world, and begin to live the life God created for them. Every unborn baby should be able to be born and welcomed into the world with joy.

Of course we know there are pregnancies that can be unexpected, and can take place in the midst of problems. That's why our "calling" this evening---what brings us together---is not only just to pray for an end to abortions, but also to do

everything we can to help when a pregnancy presents challenges and problems. Just like Mary did for Elizabeth.

To be “pro-Life” means much more than just being against abortions. It means doing whatever it takes to protect, foster, and care for the gift of human life in our families, in our community, in our parishes, and in our Diocese.

We are extremely grateful to our Catholic Charities “Caring Network” programs here in our Diocese which provides that loving assistance with great compassion and care.

We continue to encourage the “Walking with Moms in Need” program, a new initiative in our country, and growing here in a number of our parishes, who provide the same kind of support and accompaniment to pregnant mothers who are struggling, as our Blessed Mother did to Elizabeth.

We are extremely grateful to our Knights of Columbus Councils throughout our Diocese who offer assistance, and who have raised funds for the purchase of at least 6 Ultrasound machines throughout our Diocese, and the many others available at our hospitals and clinics, which so often help pregnant mothers who may be considering an abortion to not do so once they see the child in their wombs.

We encourage the regular practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy by all of us so that we can offer comfort and aid to those who abandoned or neglected; we can fight to end human slavery, trafficking and sexual abuse; so that we can welcome the immigrant and help them to find security in a new home among us; that we can speak out in defense of religious freedom and for the protection of following our well-formed conscience; that we work to bring an end to capital punishment, nuclear arms and an end to violence and wars; and that we can give comfort to those who feel that no one cares for them and therefore, consider euthanasia as a solution to their problems.

While part of the reason that brings us together here this evening is to lament the awful impact that the sin of abortion has had in our country, and here in our Diocese---and that it continues to have---and pray for an end of legalized abortions; the more important reason that brings us together is because we are People of Faith and Hope. We come together to give thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life. We come together to praise God our Creator Who continues to bring order out of chaos, Light out of darkness, and Life out of death. We come

together to be strengthened by God's Word and to be nourished by the Gift of the Eucharist, so that we too can go forth, and "*lay down our lives for our sisters and brothers*", as Jesus has for us----so that we can "*Love not just in word or in speech, but in deed and in truth*".

And may all of us, gathered here in person or virtually, recommit ourselves to never see any human life as unwanted or dispensable. May we allow our hearts to be "pregnant" with the Word Made Flesh, and let that Word motivate us to "*set out with haste*", as Mary did, to help all those in need at any point along the spectrum of life. May our hearts "*leap with joy*" whenever we encounter the amazing, beautiful, God-given gift of human life.