



MOST REVEREND
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My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

"Equality begins in the Womb." This is the theme for the 49th annual March for Life which will be held on January 21, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

January 22, 2022, marks 49 years since the landmark Supreme Court decision legalizing (Roe v. Wade) abortion in the United States. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, January 22nd is a particular day of prayer and penance called the "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children." It notes: "In all the Dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when January 22 falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life and of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion."

Scripture affirms the life and dignity of the unborn child. In Jeremiah 1:4-5, we read: "The Word of the Lord came to me: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." King David, in his Psalms, notes: "You formed my inmost being: you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know. My bones are not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me unformed; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be." (Psalms 139: 13-16) The catechism of the Catholic Church is clear in its defense of the unborn. It states: "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person -- among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life... since the first century of the church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable." (Catechism #2270-71).

Why is the church so firm in its defense of the unborn? A civil society cannot stand if its weakest, most vulnerable members are not protected. The catechism states, quoting Donum Vitae: "The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to afford them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations a state based on law were undermined." Saint John Paul II also argues that a civil society cannot be maintained if the rights of the unborn are not protected. He notes in Evangelium Vitae: "Really what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, is betrayed in its very foundations; how is it possible to speak of the dignity of every human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted? In the name of what justice is the most unjust of discriminations practiced; some individuals are held to be deserving of defense and others are denied that dignity? When this happens, the process leading to the breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence and the disintegration of the state itself has already begun." (EV, 20)

We must pray to heal the culture. Healing the culture begins with a respect for life in its most vulnerable moments. There are many points of light. I think of the crisis pregnancy centers that offer material emotional, and spiritual support to women facing an unexpected pregnancy. I think of the work of the Sisters of Life in New York who offer healing retreats for women who have had abortions and the many faithful in our diocese who work so untiringly to build a culture of life. Thank you for our important work. "Equality begins in the womb." Together let us both work together for a more just society -- a society that recognizes and affirms the equality and gifts of the most vulnerable in or midst--the unborn.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop of Norwich