

## **Pro-Life Homily, January 25/26, 2020**

*A message from Cardinal Seán O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston*

When the Church raises a prophetic cry, "Choose Life", we are performing a great service to all society. Life is sacred. Life is a mystery. Life must be protected, nurtured, respected. The Gospel of Life is the center piece of the Church's social teaching.

When the value of life is compromised or diminished, all life is at risk. When we give the State the power to determine which human beings are worthy of living and which should be eliminated, what we are doing is opening a Pandora's Box that unleashes every kind of injustice and violation of human dignity and jeopardizes the very meaning of democratic coexistence. Rather than societies of people living together, we create a society where people are rejected, marginalized, uprooted and oppressed.

The Church's consistent life ethic contrasts with the incoherent proclamation of human rights that fails to protect life when it is most vulnerable.

Human rights, without the right to life, are the Kings New Clothes – it's a fraud, an exercise in self-deception.

The Church's Pro-Life message is a great service to all society. The culture of death flows out of the extreme individualism of our age. The Church's antidote is community and solidarity. Pope Francis is always talking about a culture of encounter.

The Holy Father laments the fact that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations.

The Good News is that God never gives up on us. He never tires of loving us. He never tires of forgiving us, never tires of giving us another chance. The Pro-Life Movement needs to be the merciful face of God to women facing a difficult pregnancy. Being judgmental or condemnatory is not part of the Gospel of Life.

We are often quick to judge people because we have not walked in their moccasins. Until we find ourselves in the same situation we don't know, we might do the same thing that we judge others for.

The gospel story of the encounter of Jesus with the woman caught in adultery is one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament. The Pharisees are determined to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Should the woman be punished by death as the law demanded? If Jesus said "no" they would accuse him of neglecting to obey the law. If Jesus said "yes, kill her", He would turn people against Him for having the woman killed.

The Pharisees brought in the woman almost like a stage prop to use her for their political purposes. It is interesting to note that her partner has escaped punishment. It is only the woman who pays the price for their actions. She is filled with shame and is in fear for her life, with feelings of anger, despair, disappointment and a profound sense of loneliness.

The feelings of the woman in the Gospel must be like the young woman caught in a crisis situation of an unwanted pregnancy. She feels overwhelmed, alone, afraid, confused.

We must never allow that woman to perceive the Pro-Life movement as a bunch of angry self-righteous Pharisees with stones in their hands, looking down on her and judging her. We want the woman to experience the merciful love of Christ. Jesus does not condone the woman's fall, but He does not condemn her. He invites her to make a new start, to know that she is forgiven and loved. Pope Francis urges us to practice "the art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other, in this case, the woman in crisis. This accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian Life. This is precisely what the Sisters of Life, Project Rachel and the many Pro-Life ministries are doing.

As believers and members of Christ's Family, we want to save the thousands of innocent children who are being executed by the very people whose profession and mission should be to heal and protect life. The truth is that we can save those babies only by saving the Mothers. When they experience God's loving mercy in a community that cares about them, then they will become capable of showing mercy to their children. The Pro-Life Movement has to be about saving Mothers. We need to focus on the women to try to understand what they are suffering.

There are millions of women in our country who have had abortions, millions of men who pushed them, encourage them, and drove them to the abortion clinic. Wouldn't it be wonderful if some of them could accept John Paul II's challenge to those who have chosen abortion to commit themselves to life, "whether by accepting the birth of other children, or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them; to become promoters of a new way of looking at human life."

One person to take up this challenge was Dr. Bernard Nathanson, the founder of NARAL and the Pro-Abortion Movement in the U.S. In the 1970's Dr. Nathanson ran an abortion clinic in New York City, which operated from 8:00am 'till midnight. He performed roughly 100 abortions a day.

But then, after having promoted abortion and convincing people of its urgency, Bernard Nathanson, finally heard that child's voice pointing out the inconvenient truth. His conscience could no longer allow him to fool himself into believing that this unborn child was not a human being.

Dr. Bernard Nathanson became the most eloquent opponent of abortion and the abortion industry. In 1982 I invited him to come and speak to Black and Hispanic leaders in the Archdiocese of Washington. A few years later Dr. Nathanson accompanied me to Honduras where he presented his film, The Silent Scream, to the medical faculty, and on National television. He was very instrumental in getting the laws that legalized abortion in Honduras reversed. He spent the rest of his life trying to do the same in the United States.

God's grace turned Saul of Tarsus, the implacable persecutor of the Church, into the Apostle of the Gentiles; and that grace transformed Bernard Nathanson, the Founder of NARAL, into an apostle of the Gospel of Life.

The challenge Pope Francis places before our young people is to be evangelizers. To evangelize with beauty and joy not with self-righteousness and disdain. The Holy Father says (in *Evangelii Gaudium*): "To communicate the moral teachings that promote growth in the Gospel way of life, it is helpful to stress again and again the attractiveness and ideal of a life of wisdom, self-fulfillment and enrichment. In light of that positive message, our rejection of the evils which endanger that life can be better understood. Rather than experts in dire predictions, dour judges bent on rooting out every threat and deviation, we should appear as joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shines forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel."

At Lampedusa Pope Francis cast a wreath into the sea where thousands of poor immigrants lost their lives at sea. He warned about the globalization of indifference.

We face this in the Pro-Life Movement. Just as with slavery in the past, today many Americans are repulsed by abortion but believe that it is a necessary evil. Our task is to show them that it is not necessary. It is an evil, but it is not necessary.

Where there are community and solidarity, more humane solutions present themselves when there is a difficult pregnancy. When the abortion decision of the Supreme Court was handed down, the logical response of our Pro-Life Movement was a resolute call for "Adoption, not abortion". The truth is each year there are fewer and fewer adoptions while the number of abortions is over a million. Many young Americans don't know anyone who is adopted, and if they do know someone, it is probably someone from China, Russia or Guatemala – giving the impression that entrusting a child to an adoptive family is not something Americans do.

We need people to hear the good stories of adoptions of courageous birth mothers and generous adoptive families that have truly provided a loving family for an adopted child. In Boston we are making adoption part of a Pro-Life curriculum for our young people.

The majority of women who succumb to abortion are poor. Poverty is a dehumanizing force that leads people to feel trapped and to make this horrible choice. The Gospel of Life demands that we work for economic justice in our country and in our world. In a society where the rich are getting ever richer and the poor poorer, abortion looms ever larger. Planned Parenthood was founded to eliminate the poor.

We can rescue unborn babies from abortion by rescuing their mothers from a life of poverty and hopelessness. Pope Francis challenges our complacency and indifference to the oppressive poverty that spawns so many abortions.

Yes, the Catholic Church's consistent life ethic is a great service to society. It is our task to witness to the truth that love, compassion and solidarity can build a just society that will be safer for the poor, the unborn and those on the periphery.

I often share with people the fact that on the island of Martha's Vineyard there is a beautiful church dedicated to St. Augustine. There are lovely stain glass windows that depict the seven sacraments. When the tourists enter the church, the first window they see is one that represents the sacrament of confession with the crossed keys, the priest's stole and the words: "Go and sin no more". But the church is not air conditioned so in the hot days of summer they open all the windows in the church. Well, the only pane of glass that opens on that window is the part where the words "no" appear. So, tourists enter the church and see the window that says "Go and sin more".

In my ten years as Bishop there, not one person ever complained about the window. The irony is that many people think of us Catholics as people of No ---- don't do this, don't do that. In reality we are the people of Yes --- yes to God, yes to life, yes to compassion for the poor and suffering, yes to the solidarity and community that make us messengers of joy even in a valley of tears.