

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons preach on the Gospel of Life on the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children (Wednesday, January 22) and the prior weekend (January 18-19).

While the Day of Prayer is observed on January 22, not all parishioners will be able to attend this midweek Mass. Incorporating Respect Life themes in the preceding Sunday Mass homily will allow a greater number in the parish community to be made aware of and participate in this day of prayer and penance called for by the Church.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study on the weekly Sunday readings, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of other ministry gatherings.

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time | January 19, 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14a, 12a

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Today's First Reading speaks of God forming each of us in the womb of our mother. He fashioned human beings in His own image and likeness, and this endows each person with a dignity that no other creature can claim. God has *chosen us* to be recipients of His unending love and to be a light to the nations. St. Paul tells us in the First Letter to the Corinthians that we are called to be *holy*, set apart, and sanctified by Christ.

God further elevated the dignity of the human person through the Incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, through which "he united himself to all men" (CCC, 432). The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. God became one of us—taking on our humanity and sharing fully in our trials and sufferings. Christ came to the earth through the womb of a woman that He might bring about our salvation. For, although God created us in His image and likeness, our first parents chose to disobey Him, who had loved them into existence. They chose to reject the fullness of God's gift of life, and through their disobedience sin entered the world.

Each year on January 22, all dioceses in the United States are called to observe a *Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children*. January 22 is the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decisions that

legalized abortion throughout our nation. Since then, over 60 million lives have been lost. That's more than the size of Italy's population.

This coming Wednesday, we set aside a day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. It is also a day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. We are each called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or giving alms.

The act of abortion rejects God's gift of life. Abortion destroys the life of a child, lovingly knit together in his or her mother's womb, and for someone who has participated in abortion, the loss of a child can form a hole in their heart so deep that sometimes it seems nothing can fill the emptiness. As a human and Christian family, we grieve the loss of so many lives. And yet, even in our grief, we know there is hope.



In the Gospel, John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and cries out: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Christ came for the very purpose of redeeming our sins, offering us His forgiveness, and giving us His peace. Jesus comes to free us from the bonds of sin. And there is no sin that is beyond God’s mercy. It is never too late to seek the Lord’s mercy and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His greatest desire is to forgive us, pouring out His infinite mercy upon us so that we may be healed. If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. You can find out more information about the Church’s ministry for healing after abortion by visiting hopeafterabortion.com. (That website is listed in this week’s bulletin.)

We are all sinners. But with the grace of God, we can be holy. We can be lights to the nations, sharing the truth about the irrevocable dignity of the human person. Where sin abounds, God’s grace abounds all the more. Therefore, let us take courage and offer prayer and penance, that all human life would be welcomed in love and protected in law. In all trials, tragedies, and sufferings, *Christ is our hope*.



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Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children | Wednesday, January 22, 2020

First Reading: Genesis 1:1 – 2:2

Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15

Second Reading: 1 John 3:11-21

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 119:88

Gospel: Luke 1:39-56

Today, all dioceses in the United States are called to observe a *Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children*. January 22 is the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decisions that legalized abortion throughout our nation.

The Church sets today aside as day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. It is also a day of penance for all violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. To help us in this observance, today we celebrate the *Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life*. As individuals, we are each called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or almsgiving.

In the First Reading, we hear the beautiful story of creation. We hear how God created the night and the day, the earth and the sky, the land and the waters, and all the creatures of the earth. And God saw that it was *good*.

But creation was not yet complete. Genesis tells us:

*God created man in his image;
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.”

By creating man and woman in His own image, God endowed the human race with a dignity that no other creature can claim and that can never be taken away. Therefore, human life must be cherished, valued, and protected above all else.

Today’s Psalm expounds on that creation story as we are told how God lovingly knits each of us together in our mother’s womb. It is ultimately God who forms our fingers and our toes, our hearts and souls. He therefore knows our inmost being and the depths of our hearts. We are *fearfully* and *wonderfully* made by God as the crown of creation. And for this we offer God our praise.



By virtue of this dignity with which we have been endowed by God, we are called to love one another as brothers and sisters. In the Second Reading, St. John recalls the story of Cain and Abel, which comes shortly after the story of creation. This is the first occasion in Scripture in which we see a person take the life of another human being. We are told that Cain allowed his heart to be hardened by anger and jealousy. Sin crept into his soul, preventing Cain from recognizing the dignity of his brother. The story of Cain demonstrates how those who allow sin to find a place in their hearts are blinded to the truth.

Abortion is an example of how we, as individuals and as a society, fail to recognize the dignity of each child, knit within the womb of his or her mother. We allow

our hearts to be hardened to the truth. Our culture either fails to recognize the undeniable humanity of unborn children, who deserve our love and protection, or disregards it.

But the Gospel reveals how we *should* respond to the gift of new life. In the story of the Visitation, we see Mary, an unmarried woman who is newly pregnant with the Infant Jesus, going in haste to the aid of her cousin Elizabeth, who is herself six months pregnant. Luke tells us that at the very moment that Elizabeth heard the sound of Mary's voice, the infant in Elizabeth's womb *leaped for joy*. From the womb of his own mother, John the Baptist recognizes the presence of Jesus, hidden within the womb of Mary. And Elizabeth responds with those familiar and beautiful words: *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"* Both John and Elizabeth recognize the life hidden within Mary's womb, the one who is their Savior.

This Gospel passage so tenderly illustrates the humanity of all unborn children, created in God's own image and likeness. Every new life should be greeted with the same joyful enthusiasm that led John the Baptist to literally leap in the womb of Elizabeth.

While God's gift of new life is always something to be celebrated, we must also recognize that a pregnancy, especially when unexpected, can bring with it many challenges. Mothers too often find themselves afraid, vulnerable, abandoned, and in need. And God calls us to respond in love. We are called to go in haste, as the Blessed Mother did, to offer expectant mothers the support, encouragement, and love that they deserve. Mary's example should inspire us to serve mothers and families, even amidst our own needs.

On this day, may we join the Church in continued prayer for the legal protection of all unborn children. May we offer penance for all violations against the dignity of human life. In a special way, may we also pray for all women and men who suffer from participation in abortion, that they may find healing, peace, and reconciliation with God.

And may we recommit ourselves to supporting all expectant mothers. May we never fail to *set out ... in haste*. As the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy, so may our hearts leap with joy at the wonders of new life in every expectant mother.

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