

The fortieth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* lands squarely within the *Year of Faith*. It is as if the Holy Father has given the Church in the United States a focused time to acknowledge the great sin of abortion with all its manifold consequences, and to embrace a time of penance and conversion. Above all, in this *Year of Faith*, may the Church and all its members become living witnesses to God's longing to forgive and to pour out his healing mercy upon all those who have promoted or been wounded by the culture of death.

Pope Benedict has invited us on a journey of faith to open our eyes to the grandeur and beauty of all human life and to become courageous and effective defenders of every human life.

How will you respond to this invitation?

The Holy See calls each of us in this *Year of Faith* to study the teachings of Catholicism and to strengthen our personal relationship with our Lord. While the Church singles out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as foundational for our reflection, it also calls our attention to the beautiful teachings in the pro-life encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the *Gospel of Life*. So for Americans, the *Year of Faith* can be a time of reflection and response to forty years of the culture of death with the inspiring vision of the *Gospel of Life*.

May we take full advantage of this coming year, as individuals, parishes and organizations, in our prayer, reflection and acts of reparation. As we enter the Year of Faith, may the journey open our eyes to human life in all its grandeur and beauty.



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FAITH OPENS OUR EYES
TO HUMAN LIFE
IN ALL ITS GRANDEUR
AND BEAUTY



RESPECT LIFE

In 2013 our country will observe a shameful anniversary, marking forty years of a “culture of death” that began when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roe v. Wade*, struck down all state laws restricting abortion. Since the advent of “legalized” abortion, over 53 million children have lost their lives, and their parents and family members have been forever, unalterably changed.

In addition to opening the door to abortion on request for all nine months of pregnancy, the Supreme Court’s decision eroded respect for human life and led to a growing acceptance of death as the “solution” to personal and societal problems. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are now promoted as answers to declining health and disability. Human embryonic stem cell research, in which week-old embryos are sacrificed, is championed as a means to cure disease. To solve the problem of low fertility, many doctors create human embryos in their clinics, knowing full well that few embryos will survive to birth and the majority will be discarded or die. And the death penalty is still vigorously defended as the answer to violent crime.

A long time ago, God the Father allowed the Israelites to wander in a wasteland for forty painful years. This exile was not only a punishment for having rejected him, it was also a test of their faithfulness before they would be allowed to enter the land he had promised them. At the end of their time in the desert, the Israelites were given one final challenge: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, / by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him” (Dt 30:19-20).

Even after reaching Canaan, the Israelites had to endure many



battles before they could freely occupy the land. All this was to strengthen their faith in God and affirm their total reliance on him. So, too, have these last forty years tested our faithfulness. But they have also strengthened the resolve of many Christians, especially teens and young adults, to be more determined than ever to help bring about a “culture of life.”

How do we strengthen our faith and resolve today, as our country marks forty years in the wasteland of the culture of death? Providentially, Pope Benedict XVI has declared a worldwide *Year of Faith*, beginning on October 11, 2012 and concluding on November 24, 2013. In introducing the *Year of Faith*, the Holy Father spoke of the grave difficulties of our time, and the need for the Church to lead people out of the desert and clasp sinners to its bosom. He suggested a path of penance and renewal and called for authentic conversion and witness to charity so the Church might be the visible community of God’s mercy.

The Holy Father reminds us that faith is a journey, a pilgrimage. The path to true happiness is a path of penance and renewal. As pilgrims make their progress, both the pathway and the journey can change them profoundly. The Israelites who set out for the Promised Land were not the same Israelites who finally entered Canaan. As they grew in their faith, they were finally able to recognize the treasure God put before them. Faith opens our eyes to the true value of what is before us. In the light of faith, we come to understand that every human being is priceless in the Father’s eyes because our lives have been ransomed at the price of his Son Jesus’ blood.