

**Reflection – Holy Hour for Life  
National Prayer Vigil for Life**

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Brothers and sisters in Christ,

St. John's Gospel (chap. 15:9-10) tells us:

***As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.***

***If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.***

***"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.***

***This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.***

***No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.***

Tonight, we gather in this holy place, in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord, on an important anniversary, and we experience a graced hour. We gather not only to pray, but to remain.

It is fitting that we begin here, before the Lord who has given Himself entirely to us.

This year also marks the eight hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi. And a beautiful story from the Franciscan tradition comes from his dear friend St. Clare.

In the year 1240, Assisi was threatened by invading imperial forces. One of their first targets was the small convent of San Damiano, where St. Clare and her sisters lived a hidden life of prayer and poverty. The soldiers approached and breached the outer walls. The sisters were terrified and ran to Clare, who at that time was weak and ill.

St. Clare did not flee. She asked that the Blessed Sacrament be brought to her.

The chaplain carried the ciborium containing the Body of Christ. Her sisters carried Clare to a window overlooking the advancing troops. And there, holding the Eucharistic Lord before her and before the soldiers, she prayed aloud:

“Behold, my Lord, is it possible that You would deliver into the hands of pagans Your defenseless servants, whom I have taught out of love for You? Protect them, Lord, whom I cannot now protect by myself.”

According to the earliest Franciscan chronicles, a strange fear seized the soldiers. They dropped their ladders. They abandoned the assault. And they fled.

Later, Clare would tell her sisters that she heard a voice from the tabernacle say:  
“I will always protect you.”

She took refuge in Christ’s presence.

And tonight, we take refuge here, not because we are afraid, but because we know where our strength comes from. We bring here our hearts, our prayers, our intentions, and our longing for a greater reverence for every human life from conception **until** natural death.

Before we walk tomorrow, we kneel tonight.

In the Gospel, Jesus says:

***“Remain in my love...***

***Love one another as I have loved you...***

***No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”***

These are not simply moral instructions.  
They are a revelation of what it means to be human.

To remain in love.  
To receive love.  
To become capable of giving love.

That is what makes us real.

But in John’s Gospel, there is one man who does not remain.

At the Last Supper, Judas receives the bread, but he does not receive the relationship.  
Scripture says quietly:

“He took the morsel and left at once. And it was night.” (John 13:30)

Judas does not simply leave a room.  
He leaves communion with Jesus.

Jesus is offering him mercy.  
Jesus is offering him relationship.  
Jesus is offering him His love.

But Judas experiences that love as a threat, perhaps to his plans, to his expectations, to the kind of Messiah he wanted. And so he leaves. He does not know how to receive love. And leaving love leads into night.

John 15 reveals why Jesus can give Himself completely.

The Father eternally loves the Son.  
The Son eternally receives that love.  
And the Holy Spirit is the living gift and communion of that love.

God is not first power.  
God is love given and love received.

Jesus can lay down His life because He is perfectly loved.  
He knows how to receive love, and therefore, He knows how to give love.

And here, a small story by Margery Williams opens that truth for the heart.

### **[The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams]**

Once upon a time, a little boy received a Christmas gift, a soft velveteen rabbit, plump and gentle, with bright eyes and pink-lined ears. He was not mechanical. He did not buzz, wind, or perform tricks. And so, after the excitement of Christmas passed, he spent many quiet days on a shelf, listening as other toys boasted of their cleverness and pretended to be real.

One night, lying near the hearth, the rabbit asked an old, worn toy, the Skin Horse, a simple question: *What does it mean to be real?*

And the answer surprised him. Being real, the Skin Horse said, is not about how you are made. It is something that happens to you. It happens when someone loves you, not briefly, not just to play, but deeply and faithfully, over time. Love changes you. Love costs you something. It wears you down, **but it makes you real.**

The rabbit longed for that kind of love, though he feared what it might cost.

Then one night, when the boy could not find his usual bedtime toy, the rabbit was placed in his arms. From that moment on, everything changed. The boy carried him everywhere. He slept with him. He whispered secrets to him. He took him into the garden and into the woods, building little homes for him among the flowers. The rabbit was never left behind.

Slowly, without noticing, the rabbit changed. His fur grew thin. His whiskers were loved away. His nose lost its color. But to the boy, he had never been more precious. And one day, when someone called him “just a toy,” the boy said firmly, “He isn’t a toy. He’s real.”

Then illness came. The boy grew dangerously sick, and the rabbit stayed pressed against him night after night, sharing the heat of the fever, the fear, and the long waiting. When the boy finally recovered, the doctor ordered that everything from the sickroom be destroyed. And so, the rabbit, old, worn, and deeply loved, was taken outside and left to be burned.

Alone for the first time, the rabbit wept; he wept not from fear, but from loss. And where his tear fell to the ground, a flower sprang up, unlike any other flower in the garden. From its heart stepped a Fairy, radiant, beautiful, and gentle.

She said to him, “You were real to the boy, because he loved you. Now you shall be real to everyone.”

She gathered the rabbit in her arms and kissed him. And with that kiss, the rabbit became truly alive, no longer velveteen, but breathing and running and free, at home among the other rabbits in the fields and woods.

And in the springtime, when the days grew warm again, the boy walked in the woods behind his house. Two rabbits appeared from the pasture. One of them looked strangely familiar. And though the boy did not know why, his heart recognized something he had loved before.

We become real, authentically human, by being loved.  
And we become capable of giving life because we have first received love.

This is at the heart of the pro-life mission.

Saint John tells us that *perfect love drives out fear* (1 John 4:18). And so often, abortion does not begin with a rejection of life, but with **fear**, fear that overwhelms love.

The fear of being alone.  
The fear of being unsupported.  
The fear that life will be too heavy to carry.

Many women today are not hearing, “*You are not alone.*”  
They are hearing, “*Figure it out.*”

And when fear suffocates the experience of being loved, the capacity to welcome life can feel impossible.

This is not a failure of humanity.  
It is a wound in the heart.

Also, when a woman who is pregnant has never been told, or shown, that she herself is worthy of love simply because she exists, it becomes harder to believe that the life within her is worthy of protection. That is a tragedy. That is the darkness Scripture calls *night*.

And the Church is called to be light.  
To be refuge.  
To be presence.  
To be a community that remains.

And so tonight, we do what St. Clare did.

We remain.  
We place ourselves before the Lord.  
We receive His love.

So that we may become the people who know how to love.  
So that we can genuinely love others.

And tomorrow, when we walk, we will walk not from anger, but from communion, as people who have remained here tonight before the Lord who gives Himself completely, and having received His love, we go forth to make that love present in the world.