

DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN: PREACHING FOR LIFE

Forty-second Anniversary of the Supreme Court Abortion Decisions (January 22, 2015)

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. The liturgical celebrations for this day may be the Mass "For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life" (no. 48/1 of the Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions), celebrated with white vestments, or the Mass "For the Preservations of Peace and Justices" (no. 30 of the Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions), celebrated with violet vestments. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 373; American adaptation)

- *[Do you have a personal story you could share of someone who has faced suffering heroically? Another option would be to tell the following story of Blessed Chiara Badano].*

In the late 1980s, a 17 year old Italian girl named Chiara began experiencing an incredible amount of pain throughout her body. After she visited medical professionals and underwent a series of tests, it was discovered that she had terminal bone cancer. Ultimately, this painful condition rendered her essentially paralyzed. Unable to play tennis, dance, or run (some of her favorite activities), Chiara was confined to her hospital bed for the next two years. When friends or family members would come to visit her in order to cheer her up, the way she attended to them left them realizing that they were the ones who were being encouraged and strengthened! Chiara refused to accept pain-killers because she said that they made it too difficult to concentrate. She said, "there's only one thing I can do now: to offer my suffering to Jesus because I want to share as much as possible in his sufferings on the cross." In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI beatified Chiara.

- Blessed Chiara had a vision of life that revealed a "Sanctity of Life" ethic. She knew that there is a God who gives all our lives (even painful and difficult lives) meaning and purpose. The alternative vision that the culture around us presents is called a "Quality of Life" ethic. This alternative and painfully shallow vision of life indicates that life is only "worth it" if a person is young, healthy, pain-free, and surrounded by loved ones. This "Quality of Life" ethic is utterly bankrupt. It cannot make sense of any life that doesn't match up to a 21st-century American vision of health, strength and prosperity. It doesn't know what to do with individuals who are suffering. It doesn't know what to do with human beings who are developmentally disabled or incapacitated or those whose lives are considered to be non-productive.



- After she had given all that she had to others, Blessed Chiara stated, “I have nothing left, but I still have my heart. And with that, I can always love.”
- What story, what “vision” has each of us been adopting? Have we even unknowingly adopted a “Quality of Life” perception over a “Sanctity of Life” understanding? Have we ever found ourselves saying (or thinking) something along the lines of, “If I didn’t have my sight, my legs, my consciousness, _____, my life would not be worth living”?
- We are afraid. Many of us are afraid of pain and suffering. That simply means that we are human. But because we are human, we are uniquely qualified to recognize that there is meaning in our lives, and even meaning in our suffering.
- Jesus Christ reveals God’s perspective on suffering. Through sin, suffering entered the world. But Jesus showed us through his suffering and death that there is great meaning in suffering and that even in the hardest times, there is always hope. His death was not the end of the story. In fact, Christ’s free acceptance of his suffering and death redeemed the world! Our suffering, if we unite it to Christ’s, shares in its redemptive value, teaches us wisdom, and helps us grow in communion. Suffering reveals our creaturely limitations and gives us the invitation to entrust ourselves to God, who says to each of us, “I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you” (Is 49:15-16).
- Offering our suffering, then, is a way of uniting ourselves in a particular way with Jesus and with his suffering. The sacrificial nature of love, which is written into our human nature, means that we long to give ourselves away in love, out of love for another. From this reality, of which there is none greater, to suffer for love brings peace, and even joy. To embrace our Cross with Christ out of love for him changes everything.
- In the Beatitudes, Jesus reveals that a life fully lived is going to involve pain as well as blessing. But he also reveals that there are greater things than seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. It is worth noting that Jesus himself was born into a painful situation--what one might call a “crisis pregnancy”: a foster-father who was at a loss when he heard the news, a birth into an impoverished family and a hostile environment (Herod’s massacre), early childhood years as an immigrant (in Egypt), and even homelessness at various points. Jesus did not have a “quality” life from the start.
- Each and every human life is valuable. If not, then no human life is valuable. If we could root the dignity and value of a human being in anything other than being made in the image and likeness of God, then that dignity would always be fragile and never permanent. If it were rooted in so-called “quality” of life, then a person would be less valuable when they have less pleasure and more pain. If dignity were rooted in a person’s strength or intelligence, then those who are stronger or smarter



would be more valuable than those who are weaker or less intelligent. If worth were rooted in a person's ability to contribute or not be dependent on those around him or her, then individuals who are most in need would be the least "deserving" of help and attention. However, we know that our worth is not rooted in any of these things; our God-given dignity can never be taken away, and no person is ever less deserving of our love than another.

- The "Quality of Life" ethic leads us down a road where not all life is treated as being valuable. The "Sanctity of Life" ethic leads us to the kind of world where everyone is valued—not for what they can do, but for the fact that they are created, and created by God. It is a world in which we joyfully acknowledge that "[e]ven the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect" (Pope Francis' 2013 Day for Life Greeting).
- Do we truly want to create a world where other human beings who are considered to be inconvenient are treated as though they are disposable?
- By our prayers, by our actions, by the way we treat other people, we help to shape the world in which we live. Will it be a world where the "Quality of Life" ethic reigns and no one's permanent value is recognized, or one in which the "Sanctity of Life" ethic prevails and everyone is treated according to their incalculable worth, which nothing can take away?

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