

January 24, 2021: Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

The annual March for Life in Washington D.C. will take place this Friday, January 29th. Each year, as we face this difficult moment, it brings up the question of how we are called to address the issue of not *only* abortion, but what it means to be *fully* pro-life. It is an important topic and so it needs to be discussed in a way that is pastorally sensitive to what is a powerfully important issue. It is so easy to create a situation where there is far more heat than light. We can allow *our* way of looking at one particular issue to cloud how we will communicate the full breadth and depth of what needs to be presented.

I believe that part of the issue arises from an essential difference of perspective. There are two primary issues that create a divide that can make it difficult to create room for true communication. The first issue is: how does life originate? Is life simply a biological accident or does God make a deliberate decision to bring all life into existence? From a pro-life perspective, life is a deliberate and concrete action taken by God. As human beings, we have a responsibility to accept God's choice and become co-creators with Him. The decision never lies in human hands since it is an action by God and we must act in accord with his will. Moreover, because God has not simply chosen to create us, but to create us in his likeness, all human life is imbued with dignity and sacredness that sets it apart from all other life. We see this in the redemption wrought by Christ through his incarnation (the action of the second person of the Trinity uniting his divine nature with a human nature in the person of Christ) and culminating in his death and resurrection. God, in the incarnation, further strengthened the sacredness of human life. As such, the choice to discontinue life *never* belongs to human beings.

The second issue is the idea that our bodies are our own, and that no one has the right to dictate what I can or cannot do with my body. Again, from a pro-life perspective this is totally inaccurate. The reality is that our bodies are gifts from God, and we are called to use them in accord with his will, and *not* our own. Our responsibility is to make use of this gift in a way that gives greater glory to God. We can never, from a Christian perspective, make choices according to '*what I feel is best for me*'. Rather, we must simply ask ourselves, how does my choice uphold the inherent dignity and sacredness that God has imbued me with? All our choices must always come back to that one question: am I glorifying and praising God by the choice I am making?

Beyond these issues is an even deeper problem: how do we communicate with the other side? The problem begins with how we label those who agree or disagree with us. There are so many labels that people use: pro-life, anti-abortion, pro-choice, pro-abortion, pro-women, anti-women, and so forth. The truth, if we are honest with ourselves, is that the other side in reality is simply the enemy. And when that is our perspective it is difficult to begin true dialogue. If a person is truly pro-life, then the other person is *never* the enemy. He/she is simply a person whose perspective is different from mine. I may believe and know they are wrong, but I must remember that they are as deeply loved by God as I am; they *also* are imbued with a dignity and sanctity that I have a responsibility to uphold.

We can never use the pro-life position to attack or belittle the other person, no matter what their opinion on *any* issue may be. Our primary responsibility is *never* to go on the offensive. We are never at war with the other side on any issue. Rather, we are people on a journey together. Yes, we must uphold the truth of the dignity and sanctity of human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. But, we cannot do that if we treat the other person with anything less than true respect. And it does not matter how they may choose to treat us—Jesus is very clear on that point.

If we are going to change the direction our nation has been heading in, it will not be in court battles or legislatures. I believe the most important battle is that of changing people's hearts. Only by fully engaging a true pro-life perspective and living it out will that happen. Think about how our faith started. It began with 'The Twelve'. They changed lives *not* by forcing people into submission to the truth. Rather, they lived their faith with joy and hope. They had a sense of peace and understanding of life that was attractive. They strove to live out their faith each and every day with every person they encountered. That is what allowed the faith to grow, and that is what will allow this truth to take hold in the hearts of those we encounter.

The decision that a woman faces when she discovers she is pregnant is fraught with many complex issues. Our response to these complex issues must always be centered in kindness and gentleness. In my many years of working with women who have made the decision to terminate a pregnancy, it was clear to me that it was never a simple or easy decision. My response was always to assure them of God's abiding and unconditional love for them. It is this truth that brings about healing and hope.

Let us never forget what we march for when we 'march for life'. It is not simply about trying to preserve the most innocent of human life. It is about leading all people to the truth of who God is and what God wants for us—our salvation.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Brian', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Brian