

REJOICING IN HOPE



By Bishop Robert J. Baker

THANK YOU, WASHINGTON, D.C. MARCHERS FOR LIFE FROM BIRMINGHAM DIOCESE

The Birmingham Diocese was well represented at the January 22, 2015 March for Life in Washington, D.C., joining hundreds of thousands of people from other dioceses throughout the country in expressing support for the cause of life and opposition to the January 22, 1973 decision of the Supreme Court to legalize abortion in the United States.

For 42 years people of all faiths have raised their voices to decry the taking of innocent human life on behalf of the voiceless and defenseless unborn. The cause of life was given vocal support in the nation's capitol once again by busloads of marchers from all across the nation. Major marches also took place last week in San Francisco and Los Angeles, making it easier for people from the west coast to make their voices heard as well.

Seminarians from our diocese arrived in time for the Wednesday evening Mass at the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.; and they joined young people from our diocese who arrived Thursday, Jan. 22, for the Rally for Life and Mass at the Verizon Center in D.C., prior to the march. At that Mass,

the Principal Celebrant, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C., acknowledged the presence of bishops, clergy, consecrated Religious, seminarians, and marchers -- young and old, at the Mass that was directed especially to encouraging our young people to carry on the message for Life.

EWTN and C-Span covered talks at the Mall before the march began and helped the world know something major was going on in the nation's capital, which was given poor coverage by most media outlets. The March for Life in D.C. gives one the impression of being one of the greatest non-events in history. As one of the largest marches annually in the U.S. Capitol, it gets the least media coverage.

As one who was there, I can assure our readers that while the marchers were orderly and respectful, the citizens of Washington, D.C. knew they were there. Commerce benefited by their presence, but traffic was at a stand-still in the central part of the city for hours. One could not but take note that a sizable portion of the citizenry has strong feelings about the life issues, which will be translated some day in voting booths when younger marchers come of age to vote.

I was proud of the large group from our diocese present for that event, mainly students from our high schools, chaperoned by parents and staff from our schools. Each year we celebrate a diocesan Mass in the crypt chapel of the Basilica, which we did this year on Saturday, January 24, the Vigil Mass of the Third Sunday of the Year, filling the crypt chapel. I was honored to be the principal celebrant once again, with Father Kevin Bazzel, Rector of our Cathedral and Vicar General of the diocese, as homilist. Father Bazzel gave a wonderful homily encouraging all of us to take seriously the urgency of the message of life, basing his words on the Sunday readings.

Father Michael Weston, the basilica's Director of Liturgy, noted how prayerful our young people were, many gathered way before Mass began, praying silently in the chapel. Those adults accompanying our students would pay compliments as well about how impressed they were by our students.

Now that we are back home, the memories of the March for Life are with us, but more



(LEFT) Youth from the Diocese of Birmingham pose for a photograph in the crypt Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception following Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert Baker, Jan. 24. The youth was in Washington, D.C. to attend the 2015 March for Life.

(BELOW) Exterior view of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The youth of the Diocese of Birmingham were given the fortunate opportunity to attend Mass in the crypt Church of the Basilica, Jan. 24. Bishop Baker celebrated the Mass for the youth, who were in Washington, D.C. to attend the 2015 March for Life.

(Photographs courtesy of Bishop Baker)



(ABOVE) Buses of youth groups from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C., to participate in the National Pro-Life March. Many of these buses came from Alabama. Standing in front of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception are 14 members of Our Lady of the Lake youth group in Pell City.

(Courtesy Photograph)

A Pro-Life Prayer for Our President & Public Officials



Lord God, Author of Life and Source of Eternal Life, move the hearts of all our public officials and especially our President, to fulfill their responsibilities worthily and well to all those entrusted to their care.

Help them in their special leadership roles, to extend the mantle of protection to the most vulnerable, especially the defenseless unborn, whose lives are threatened with extermination by an indifferent society.

Guide all public officials by your wisdom and grace to cease supporting any law that fails to protect the fundamental good that is human life itself, which is a gift from God and parents.

You are the Protector and Defender of the lives of the innocent unborn. Change the hearts of those who compromise the call to protect and defend life. Bring our nation to the values that have made us a great nation, a society that upholds the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Mary, the Mother of the living, help us to bear witness to the Gospel of Life with our lives and our laws, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

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THE CATHOLIC TRADITION



By David Anders

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

St. Alphonsus Ligouri once said, “He who prays will be saved; He who does not pray will not be saved.” Does this sound extreme? You might think so, but Jesus also called loving, contemplative prayer “The One Thing Necessary.” (Luke 10:42) Christ himself spent long hours in private prayer. For this reason alone, it is not surprising that the disciples should say, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1) When instructing his disciples, Jesus commanded not only liturgical prayer, but private, secret prayer: “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.” (Matthew 6:6)

Why is prayer so necessary? Do I really need to make a kind of private retreat in prayer? Doesn't the liturgy suffice? What if I make my work my prayer? Or if I find God in a beautiful sunset? Is any and all prayer

sufficient? Does it make a difference how we pray? Can we pray badly or well?

To know why prayer is necessary it helps to understand what the church teaches about salvation.

The salvation we have in Christ is not simply a matter of “going to heaven when you die.” (Though this is immeasurably important.) It is salvation *from* something, salvation *for* something. It is salvation *from* sin, from a disordered life, and from the pursuit of worthless or harmful things. And it is salvation, *for* a life of love, meaning, and transcendent purpose.

This makes it evident why the man who does not pray cannot be saved. It is for the same reason the thirsty man cannot quench his thirst without drinking. Prayer just is this raising of the mind to the transcendent purpose for which we were made. The Catechism - quoting St. John Damascene -

says, “Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God.” This turn to God in prayer is not simply a condition of salvation; it is what salvation *means* - the heart and mind caught up in the joy and beauty of God.

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21) If we do not have the habit of prayer, we do not have the habit of turning our hearts and minds to God. St. Paul once wrote, “They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” (2 Thessalonians 2:12) Prayer is how we cultivate that love of truth that is necessary for salvation.

When we have this life of prayer, we also derive great comfort. The Spirit prays with us, “with groans to deep for words.” (Romans 8:26) In this way, “The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (Romans 8:16) The love of God shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5) gives us confidence.

(RIGHT) Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, apostolic nuncio to the U.S., delivers a message from Pope Francis during a pro-life youth Mass at the Verizon Center in Washington Jan. 22. Bishop Robert Baker is seen to the left of the Archbishop.

(CNS photo Gregory A. Shemitz)



(LEFT) Students from St. Bernard Prep in Cullman pose for a group photograph. The group traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend the 2015 March for Life.

(RIGHT) Father Kevin Bazzel poses for a photograph with youth from the Diocese of Birmingham attending the March for Life in Washington, D.C.

(Courtesy Photographs)



“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other.” (1 John 3:14)

Scripture is clear that not all prayer works. The self-indulgent prayer is practically worthless. (James 4:3) So is the superstitious attempt to manipulate God with mere formulas or verbosity. Jesus warns us, “Do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7) This warning doesn't mean our minds can't wander in prayer. Even great Saints have complained of the wandering mind. As long as the *intent* is there to be with God, then we are praying.

What of finding God in the beautiful sunset? Is this kind of prayer enough? This is very good, of course. Tradition calls it *discursive meditation*. We consider a truth of revelation, of reason, or of natural beauty, and then elicit affecting emotions. But this

is not enough. Scripture urges us to go ever deeper in prayer. We press on and on so that we might be “filled with the utter fullness of God.” St. Paul explains, “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

The pathway to deeper prayer is, first, to live the gospel generously. Jesus makes repentance and reconciliation the conditions of deep prayer. (Matthew 5:24) Second, deep prayer requires the commitment of time. “Jesus,” we read, “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16) To those who live this way, Scripture offers the promise of salvation. “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13)