

January 23, 2017 12:10 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Day of Prayer for legal protection of unborn children and day of Penance for violations to the  
dignity of the human person through acts of abortion

On this gloomy and uncharacteristically warm day for late January, we come together in the middle of an otherwise normal Monday to pray.

The Church calls us to this time of prayer in light of the reality we have found to be the rule of law in our country for 44 years due to the Supreme Court's decision known as *Roe v. Wade*, overturning all State's laws against abortion, and making the right to have an abortion protected by the law of the land.

It is estimated that in those 44 years, more than 57 million unborn babies' lives have been ended before they had a chance to see the light of day because of a decision to end their lives.

While we use such terms as "terminate the pregnancy", or "a woman's right to choose", instead of "killing the unborn child"---a viable human being--- in his/her mother's womb, the reality is the same.

Over these 44 years, much of our culture has lost sight of that reality that these 57 million lives have been killed; indeed, some parts of our culture publicly rejoice in the fact that there is some kind of alleged right to do whatever a person wants to do with their body, including having a mother choose to end her unborn baby's life with the full support of our country's laws and many in the medical profession.

Because of these circumstances, we come together on this day, observing the anniversary of that Supreme Court decision, to pray.

In fact, what the Church calls us to do today is to 1) Pray for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life; AND 2) to spend this day offering prayers of repentance and taking on ourselves acts of penance for the evil that has been caused through acts of abortion.

Today, we put politics aside; today we don't argue about party platforms or who is in office or out of office. Today, we pray and do penance.

The Scripture Readings we've just listened to help us to regain the perspective we need to have as we understand our lives and see the world in which we live.

Isaiah, the Prophet who so clearly speaks out to the People of Israel---the Chosen People of God, but who so often went astray from God and God's ways---puts things into God's perspective.

As we heard him say: "*The Lord called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name.*"

From the earliest days, God's Word reminds us that **He** is the Source of Life---**He** is the Creator. While it is true that we cooperate with God in bringing forth the gift of life, which is designed to take place primarily through the act of love between husband and wife, God remains the Creator---the Author of Life.

Isaiah goes on to tell us that: "*The Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb....and made me glorious in the sight of the Lord.....My God is now my strength!*"

God gives us the gift of life; it is our responsibility to be the steward of that gift---to respect, safeguard, and protect that gift of life. We do not become God who decides if, and certainly not when, that gift of life should be ended.

Isaiah tells us that God doesn't see His creation of the human person to be a "servant-Master" relationship, but rather one that raises us up to "*make us a light to the nations*".

As we have just recently completed the Christmas/Epiphany season in which we celebrate the great Mystery of the Incarnation----that God loves us so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to be born just as we are born----growing in our mother's womb until we are ready to be born, as Jesus was born on Christmas. And as Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary, when fully-grown and began His public ministry, His primary message was to reveal to us and to all the world that our God is not just Creator, but Father; we are God's sons and daughters; we are God's beloved children, Whom Jesus came to redeem and save from the power of sin and death. But, in addition to redeeming us, Jesus came to help us to see who we are in God's sight----we are His Children; we are not God.

I remember as a boy growing up, we spent a good bit of time with my maternal grandparents, visiting them in their home, and oftentimes helping them with chores or running errands for them. One of my grandmother's favorite phrases to me when I was acting perhaps a little beyond the way she thought I should be acting was to say: "I think you've gotten too big for your britches". In other words, I didn't know my place, and I wasn't showing her the proper kind of respect or obedience.

In some ways, we might be able to say that about ourselves in many ways. Our modern culture, in many ways, has "gotten too big for our britches" in terms of our relationship with God.

We have, in many ways, decided that we don't need God; that we know as well, if not better than, God. We act in these ways of thinking we have a "right" to decide who lives and dies, especially the most innocent and vulnerable of all human beings, the unborn child.

That's partly why in today's Gospel when Jesus was asked about who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, that He used a small child as His answer, saying: "*Unless you **turn** and become humble like this child, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

A child is humble enough to know that he/she is not adult or fully grown; a child knows he or she has a lot still to learn. Jesus wants us to remember that we are God's beloved children--but we are not God!

We not only need to pray for humility, but we need to be grateful to God for the gifts that He gives to us, and to pray that we can be good stewards of those gifts, not the ones who determine those decisions that are God's and God's alone.

As Pope Francis said so beautifully in his recent Exhortation on the Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia, # 168): "From each tiny child waiting to be born, to individuals nearing death, all are precious and deserve our care and protection. Women and men suffering after abortion, individuals tempted to end their lives, couples longing to conceive a child, people pushed to the margins of society by a 'throwaway culture', expectant mothers facing challenging pregnancies, and every other person----each "has a place in God's heart from all eternity."

On this Day of Prayer and Penance, let us pray for an end to legalized abortion and the protection of all human life, and let us repent of all the ways that any of us bring evil into the world through the conscious disregard for the value of each and every human life, so that there will be great rejoicing in Heaven by our Heavenly Father.

As we prayed in our beautiful Psalm Refrain today: "*O Lord, our God, how wonderful Your Name in all the earth.*"