

“Prophets for Life”

The following is a homily delivered by Bishop Chad Zielinski at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Sunday, February 3, 2019. He invites all Catholics in our diocese to embrace a call to be “prophets for life” in these challenging times.

Today the first reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah. What is a prophet? A prophet is a messenger called and sent by God to communicate His will to the people. Prophets knew God’s will and they had the responsibility of calling Israel back to a life-giving, covenantal relationship with God when she wandered from it through sin.

Last Sunday, the first reading was from the Prophet Nehemiah. We heard Ezra the priest reading from the scroll, the law, and the people were weeping. They realized they had wandered away from God’s law through sin. Nehemiah saw their repentant hearts and announced an end to their weeping and instructed them to rejoice in God.

In the first reading today, Jeremiah 1, we clearly here God declaring, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” God is involved in Jeremiah’s life from the very beginning, in the womb. This prophetic calling of Jeremiah exists in every cell of his body because life and the procreative process were God’s idea from the beginning of creation (Genesis 1 and 2). Life is sacred and that sacred encounter with God begins in the womb for every human person.

We see this call again in Psalm 17: “For you are my hope, O Lord: my trust, O God, from my youth. On you I depend from birth; from my mother’s womb you are my strength.

I want to draw your attention to Deuteronomy 30, where Moses is gathered with all of Israel. God has delivered them from their enemies and they are about to enter a new land. However, Moses is clear about God’s law and covenant: “Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, along life for you to live on the land which the Lord swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Dt. 30:15).

Moses words reveal a covenantal relationship based on the Law and that relationship is life giving. If they live in right relationship with God and one another, they will have a fruitful and blessed life. Even the land will produce plenty of food. If not, Moses spells out doom and gloom.

In the first two verses of Hebrews, we hear, “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.” Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation, there is no new revelation. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus calls the 12 together, breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, commissions them to go forth and baptize nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The new covenant, a real and personal relationship with the Most Holy Trinity. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Church grows and successors of the Apostles are chosen. In our own baptism, we are anointed to share in the

that Apostolic office of priest, prophet, and king. Through priestly ordination and the ordination of a bishop, we see this office of teaching, governing, and sanctifying are carried out for the mission of the Church as established by Christ. Amidst the sinfulness of her ministers, Christ's Church still prevails.

So I have recalled the prophetic role of those called by God, from the womb, and God's sacred hand from the moment of our existence. My grandma Zielinski always told us, when we would ask why, that "we can never be smarter than God."

In late January, nearly a quarter of a million people gathered in Washington D.C. as a witness to the sacredness of life. On that same day the State of New York expanded its abortion laws and these laws cry out to heaven:

- New York now permits late-term abortion up to the due date. Previously, the life of the mother had to be at risk. Now, a threat to the "health of the mother" can mean just about anything.
- The law eliminated any legal penalty for a domestic violence attack against an unborn child.
- The law eliminated protections for babies accidentally born alive during an attempted abortion.

In his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, St. John Paul II declared that, "abortion...always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium."

He added: "No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church."

Oddly, the governor of New York, who identifies as Catholic, had New York's landmarks lit up in pink to celebrate the new law. He asked that the 408-foot spire of the new World Trade Center that replaced the twin towers downed by terrorists be lit pink. and claimed the lives of 2,606 innocent people. Three years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the 9/11 Memorial, which commemorates the 2,606 people who died there. Most powerful! Interestingly, there are 11 women's names listed on the memorial plaques whose names have the added phrase, "and her unborn child."

I do not need to convince you as Catholics that this abortion bill is profoundly and diametrically opposed to the truth. There is nothing to celebrate. The only candles we will light are vigil lights recalling the 60 million unborn children who have died since the legalization of abortion. Where is our nation going?

In the wake of New York, we've seen movements in Virginia and Rhode Island to expand abortion access up until birth, ostensibly out of fear the Supreme Court could overturn *Roe v. Wade*. As this anti-life sentiment seems to escalate in our nation, we as a Catholic Church cannot

remain silent. We must proclaim the sacredness and beauty of all life from conception to natural death. When life is not protected at its most vulnerable time, it WILL be attacked at various stages. This is surely happening in our country and world.

Pope Francis was in Panama about a week ago for World Youth Day. In an interview, he made some remarks about the sacredness of life and he mentioned that a doctor had told him a mother's bone marrow carries the DNA of her children. He went on to say that the mother's body has a memory of her child. Science has confirmed this—in 2007, researchers in Singapore found that cells from unborn babies actually migrate into their mother's blood, skin, and even bone marrow, and they remain there during her lifetime (1). Even more incredibly, in 2014, researchers in Ireland found cells from unborn children actually knit up into their mother's physical scars (2) and they believe the cells assist with healing. Pope Francis added that this memory of her child is not just carried in the mother's cells but in her heart, soul, and mind. When a mother loses a child, for whatever reason--and this includes abortion—there is a memory!

As a priest of 22 years, I have been part of the healing journey of many women and some men who have suffer the wounds of abortion. These souls found profound healing through the grace of God they accessed through Confession, prayer, and the offering of Masses. This healing helped them connect to their “little saint” in Heaven. I encourage everyone who encounters someone who has suffered from abortion to please reach out and bring that soul to the sacramental healing graces of the Church.

The Gospel this past weekend concluded with a frustrated crowd wanting to throw Jesus over a cliff because they did not want to hear his prophetic words. Like the prophets and Jesus, the Church must continue to preach the truth in and out of season. We must take a stand for the sacredness of life, especially in the womb, and we must be that prophetic voice of truth in a confused world. A few weeks ago, we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King, who articulated the consequences of shirking this duty to proclaim the truth in a 1965 homily: “A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's words sparked some passion within me for God and country. Many of you know I served 21 years of duty as an Air Force Chaplain. This involved 3 combat tours that still leave vivid memories etched on my mind, heart, and soul. As I reflect on this experience, there were a minimum of four times, possibly more, when I ought to have died and no longer be walking this earth. As I entered into the Air Force as an enlisted and commissioned person, I recall swearing an Oath of Enlistment and Commission to defend our Constitution. This means I literally placed my life in harm's way for the people of America and our Constitution. These promises meant I would defend and support all people, but especially the most defenseless of all—the unborn. I would return to combat many times over just so the unborn could have a voice and take a stand. Sadly, they do not have a voice and I have taken a stand as a veteran for every unborn child. I invite you to stand with me as a prophet for life.

We renew our stand for life every Sunday when we pray the Nicene Creed and profess that we believe in the truth as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. We profess we will live out that

faith. Yes, we fall into sin, but that is why we start every Mass with a penitential rite. More importantly, it's why we have the sacrament of Confession. Christ accepts our contrition and desire to live in right relationship with him and realizes we need his help. His response to our weakness is his Eucharistic presence, which he refers to as the "Bread of Life" in John 6. When we come forward to receive Holy Communion and say "Amen," this is our full consent that we acknowledge the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist; it is also a promise that we will stand for the sacredness of all human life, even unborn life. Our Catholic faith is always ordered toward life. Because of that, we cannot support any person's right to end the life of an unborn child or any other grave evils (such as euthanasia) that violate life and still righteously come before Christ to receive Him in the Eucharist.

If you do struggle to accept the Church's teachings about the sacredness of life, talk to your pastor. Go to Confession if you've received the Eucharist without truly meaning it when you said, "Amen." And above all, pray for the grace to accept the truth. A good start is, "Lord, help my unbelief" (Matt. 9:24).

As we are filled with the holy life of Jesus in the Eucharist at every Mass, may we go forth honoring, protecting, and promoting the sacredness of life from conception until natural death.

Footnotes

1. Journal of Cell Adhesion and Migration (2007), January-March, 1(1): 19–27.
2. Journal of Chimerism (2014), 5(2):40-52.