

Annual Pro-life Mass

January 22, 2003

Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

by Bishop William K. Weigand

Dear Friends,

Today marks thirty years since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in the United States. The Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton decisions made abortion legal throughout pregnancy. These decisions held that the child in the womb is not human like the rest of us: that the child in the womb does not have a fundamental and inalienable right to live.

Instead of liberating women from discrimination, abortion has betrayed women. As the U.S. bishops wrote in November: "Legal abortion promised what it could not give. It promised women freedom to participate more fully in society, but it took their children and broke their hearts. Countless women have suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually because of abortion; many have even lost their lives. Many men, too, mourn the loss of their children, while others carry the heavy burden of having persuaded their daughter, wife, or girlfriend to have an abortion." (A Matter of the Heart) Women are blessed by God and are created equal to men, with no need to mutilate or poison themselves and kill their own children in order to be regarded as equals.

We must not be discouraged because the Roe v. Wade decision still stands, or that abortion has become a virtual entitlement that cannot even be questioned. We must be people of hope. We cannot see all that God sees, and we know that Life will triumph over death and Truth will triumph over lies. The culture of death is a culture of lies.

Roe v. Wade will not stand forever. In fact, the tide has been turning for some time now. About ten days ago, the Sacramento Bee reported that the Alan Guttmacher Institute, which is affiliated with Planned Parenthood, acknowledges that the abortion rate has fallen to its lowest level in 29 years. While 1.3 million abortions still take place every year in the U.S. (42 million in the last 30 years), there is more reason than ever to be hopeful. In a Matter of the Heart, the November statement by the Bishops, we note the following:

Today fewer abortions are being performed each year, and fewer doctors are willing to be involved in abortion.

More Americans identify themselves as pro-life, while the number of those saying they are pro-choice has declined significantly.

Ultrasound and other medical advances have made possible a greater appreciation of the humanity of the unborn child. (Last November, Time magazine had a wonderful issue on the new technology available to observe human life in its earliest stages. A front cover photograph of a fetus showed the clear development of the brain, heart, and other organs of a child only 54 days after conception.)

The Bishops' message goes on to observe:

In these three decades, thousands of pregnancy resource centers have been established to provide practical assistance and support to women facing difficult pregnancies, aiding many thousands in need of help.

Most state legislatures have enacted measures to restrict or regulate the practice of abortion and reduce its incidence.

Roe v. Wade's disregard for human life has moved some people to reconsider their positions in favor of capital punishment and to resist the push to legalize assisted suicide. Above all, the pro-life movement is making major gains among the young. "Many in the last generation fought for legal abortion, but more today fight for true freedom for women." In recent Gallup polls, major restrictions on abortion were supported by 55% of adults under 30, a higher figure than for any age group except those 65 and over. Our young people know that they were created as unique individuals with their own unique DNA from the moment of their conception. They look around them and realize that in every gathering of people under thirty, one third of them are missing, because they were killed before they were even born.

As many of you are aware, Monsignor Edward Kavanagh, Pastor of St. Rose Parish and Director of St. Patrick's Home, has been one of our leading pro-life activists for many years. He has spoken the truth without regard to whether it was popular or not. In December, Monsignor confronted Governor Gray Davis about his support of abortion and challenged him to examine his conscience. I applaud Monsignor Kavanagh for his strong and consistent witness. People need to understand that you cannot call yourself a Catholic in good standing and at the same time publicly hold views that are contradictory to the Catholic faith. Thank you, Monsignor Kavanagh, for standing up for the unborn, for your dedication to truth and for your pastoral concern for souls, including the Governor's.

In stating publicly that many Catholics believe as he does, and insisting that women should retain the right to decide to kill their own children by aborting them, under the guise of making their own decisions about their bodies, Governor Davis needs to recall that we do not own our bodies. We are not proprietors. We are stewards — stewards of a sacred trust. We all must decide how to care for our bodies. But abortion entails another body, that of the infant. The prohibition of God and of the law of nature is abundantly clear: "Thou shalt not kill."

As your bishop, I have to say clearly that anyone — politician or otherwise — who thinks it is acceptable for a Catholic to be pro-abortion is in very great error, puts his or her soul at risk, and is not in good standing with the Church. Such a person should have the integrity to acknowledge this and choose of his own volition to abstain from receiving Holy Communion until he has a change of heart.

Just last week, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addressed a statement directly to politicians. In part, it stated: Catholic politicians "have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard. Those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a grave and clear obligation to oppose any law that attacks human life. A well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals."

Issues of the sacredness of human life and other questions of basic morality are matters of natural moral law, not simply of Church teaching. The Vatican statement states: "No Catholic can appeal to the principle of pluralism or to the autonomy of lay involvement in political life to support policies affecting the common good which compromise or undermine fundamental ethical requirements." There can be no division between public and private morality. It is untenable to say, "I am personally opposed to abortion," but support someone else's right to kill their unborn baby. Catholic moral doctrine respects the "rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church

— but not from morality."

The U.S. Bishops' statement of November 1998, *Living the Gospel of Life*, is even more explicit. "As bishops, we have the responsibility to call Americans to conversion, including political leaders, and especially those publicly identified as Catholics. As chief teachers in the Church, we must therefore explain, persuade, correct and admonish those in leadership positions who contradict the Gospel of life through their actions and policies. Catholic public officials who disregard Church teaching on the inviolability of the human person indirectly collude in the taking of innocent life." (#29)

"We urge those Catholic officials who choose to depart from Church teaching on the inviolability of human life in their public life to consider the consequences for their own spiritual well being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin. We call on them to reflect on the grave contradiction of assuming public roles and presenting themselves as credible Catholics when their actions on fundamental issues of human life are not in agreement with Church teaching. No public official, especially one claiming to be a faithful and serious Catholic, can responsibly advocate for or actively support direct attacks on innocent human life. No appeal to policy, procedure, majority will or pluralism ever excuses a public official from defending life to the greatest extent possible. Those who justify their inaction on the grounds that abortion is the law of the land need to recognize that there is a higher law, the law of God. No human law can validly contradict the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." (#32)

The path Jesus chose was not the easy one; but then the path of a leader never is. A true leader stands up for what is right, not for what is popular, and serves as an example for the rest of us. We know it is not politically correct to be pro-life; but right and wrong, good and evil, are never revealed to us in a poll. All human life is sacred. As stewards of God's gift, we are to respect and protect it — always and without exception. "Governor, we pray for you that you will change your heart."

As the U.S. bishops remind us: "We are not powerless. We can make a difference. We belong to the Lord; in him is our strength and through his grace, we can change the world." (#27)

The bishops also state: "We renew our offer of assistance to anyone considering abortion: If you are overwhelmed by the decisions you face, if you cannot afford medical care, if you are homeless or feel helpless, whatever your needs, we will help you. The Church and her ministries, inspired by the word and example of Jesus Christ, will help you with compassion and without condemnation.

"Roe v. Wade cannot stand as the law of this great nation, a nation founded on the self-evident truth that all people are created with an inalienable right to life. We are committed, no matter how long it may take, no matter the sacrifices required, to bringing about a reversal of this tragic Supreme Court decision. We will speak out on behalf of the sanctity of each and every human life wherever it is threatened, from conception to natural death. Roe v. Wade must be reversed." (November 2002)

A follow up statement from Bishop Weigand is available here: [Bishop's Herald Column follow up.](#)