

**Homily from Pro-Life Mass,
Little Flower Catholic Church, January 22, 2008**

Most. Rev. John H. Ricard, SSJ, Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Tonight, my dear friends in Christ, we join Catholics and other people of good will throughout the United States as we observe the anniversary of the infamous Supreme Court decision, *Roe v Wade*. That decision of our Supreme Court has, since its inception, resulted in the slaughter of more than 50 million unborn children in these United States.

This means that well over 50 million innocent children were never given the opportunity of seeing the light of day; they were never given the chance to look into the eyes of their mothers or find a loving embrace from her. They were never given the chance to take their first breath, go to the playground, attend school, chase butterflies or laugh at clowns. They will never enjoy the beauty of this gift which we call human life.

We will never know of the contribution these 50 million souls could have made to our world. We will forever remain in the dark about the new discoveries in medicine they could have uncovered. We will never experience the engineering feats or the marvels of new architecture which they could have unfolded. We will never hear the exciting melody of a new sympathy they could have composed, never know of their novel insights into poetry or literature or their discovery of new stars in our universe; had they only been given the chance to live.

Because they were not allowed to live, our nation remains impoverished when it could have been enriched. Because they were not allowed to live, our nation remains in darkness when it could have been enlightened. Because they were not allowed to live, it remains in ignorance when it could have been guided by truth.

So it is fitting that we are here at Mass in this church today, to first of all pray for the mercy and forgiveness of God that we might gain new strength for the battle and that hearts may be changed; that our nation will make reparation and forgiveness for this sin against the God of life and the human family; that those women who make these horrible choices which result in the slaughter of the unborn may be converted and live and turn to the God, who, as spoken by the prophet Isaiah "desires not the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live."

As we always do when we face difficulties, we turn to God and seek his direction in his Word, spoken to us by his prophets and his Son, Jesus.

Our first reading comes to us from the prophet Jonah (chap. 3: 1-10). The book of the prophet Jonah is written to show us that God above all is a God of love and mercy who would rather forgive and save even the enemies of his people than punish and destroy them. God directs Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh, the capitol of the great empire of Assyria, the deadly enemy of Israel. As you may remember from the story, Jonah runs away from God and would not go, but in the end he reluctantly obeys and warns the city of impending doom.

God said to him: "Go to the city and speak out against it, I am aware of how wicked its people are." Jonah started through the city, and after walking a whole day, he proclaimed, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message. So they decided that everyone should fast, and all the people, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth to show that they had repented. God saw what they did; he saw that they had

given up their wicked behavior. He changed his mind and did not punish them as he had said he would.

There is a striking similarity between the scene described in this book, the city of Nineveh and our nation. Nineveh was great and powerful, like our own country. This capitol city's influence reached over many lands and nations, like our own. Nineveh's greatest sin was the slaughter of its young in their child sacrifices to the idol Baal. We cannot help but find a striking parallel in our nation's slaughter of its unborn on the altars of abortion clinics and for reason of convenience, the excuse most often given as a reason for abortion.

But in many ways Nineveh was also different from us. When Jonah walked through the city and spoke, they heard him. Our country refuses to heed to cry of the unborn child in the womb and the plea for common sense and reason; which at least would prompt them to begin to see the inconsistencies in the pro-abortion argument.

Unlike this country and its leadership, Nineveh was determined to amend its ways. When the king heard Jonah's warning, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robes, put on sack cloth and exchanged his throne for ashes. He was deliberate in his determination to move the people away from their errant behavior. He sent out a proclamation. "This is an order from the king, no one is to eat anything, all persons, cattle and sheep are forbidden to eat and drink. All must wear sackcloth. Everyone must pray earnestly to God and must give up their wicked behavior and their evil actions."

Thus Nineveh recognized the error of its ways — unlike us — and changed, dramatically changed, so that God relented and did not punish them.

In two weeks we will begin the season of Lent. During that season we can become the new Nineveh. If we have the courage to look outside of our doors, we will see the new Nineveh walking through our streets crying out on behalf of the unborn. It will be our opportunity to lay aside our fine clothes and comfort, our food and fine wine and put on the sackcloth of intensive prayer, fasting and action on behalf of the unborn and those who cannot defend themselves. Perhaps, if we are as determined as the people of Nineveh, God may strengthen our efforts and soon rid our nation of this scourge of the slaughter of the innocents.

When the disciples of Jesus tried to rid a boy of the demon who possessed him, they had little success (Matt.17: 14-21). Sometimes we feel like them when we try to rid our nation of the demons of abortion, euthanasia and the use of embryonic stem cells. When the disciples asked why they could not save this man, Jesus replied that this could only be done through prayer and fasting. So we have our clue from our Divine Master, who bids us not to give up the fight, but to persist and remain determined to continue the battle, doing our part in prayer, fasting and resolve, until we see the day when these demons will be a distant memory.

As someone once said, "The American people are too loving, too decent, too righteous to allow this practice to continue. We will without a doubt one day see the end of this practice. Just as today we are questioning how the learned people of Nineveh could have tolerated the sacrifice of their own children at altars of idols; so one day, in the not too distant future, people will look back and wonder how we as a nation, so learned and sophisticated, would tolerate the slaughter of our young."

Let us pray that the day will come soon.