

Dear Friends in Christ,

Recently, I've heard several people tell me that the Church is only lately opposed to abortion. They tell me that one hundred years ago this was not the position of our Church. That is simply not true. Perhaps after the tragic 1973 decision of *Roe v. Wade* we were more vocal about our consistent belief in the goodness of unborn life. After all, that fateful decision led to the destruction of over 63 million innocent human lives. Still, there has never been a time when the church held that the intentional destruction of innocent, unborn life was acceptable.

We base this in the teaching of Jesus who would not reject any child and who asked us to love one another as God loves us. We read of it in the Acts of the Apostles where the faithful community took care of one another, especially the poor, and presumably helping those women who found themselves with difficult pregnancies too. And this teaching is made very clear in a document known as the *Didache* (also known as *The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*), written about the year 70 A.D., that gave direction to the life and faith of the early Church. It said very succinctly: "You shall not procure an abortion, nor destroy a newborn child."

Yes, the Church is consistent throughout its long history that the destruction of life, whether in or outside of the womb, is not in accord with reason or with faith. With regard to reason, science is clear when a genetically distinct human life begins – at conception. With regard to faith, our Church teaches that human life from its very beginning is given to us by God and it is our responsibility to protect and nurture every life.

So, now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned by the Supreme Court, the decisions we make as individuals and as a community will be brought closer to home, to the level of each state. Forces are already gathering in Ohio to take away the unalienable right to life from our children, even after a heartbeat is detected in them. Many well-intentioned persons will use the attractive rhetoric of "reproductive freedom" and call abortion, "reproductive health care." Let's not be fooled by this language. Freedom is given to us so that we can exercise our obligations to do good, not evil. And health care is meant to nurture life, not take it.

Yet, in all things, we must lead by Christian example. We must remain peaceable in our discussions, even and especially with those who oppose us. We must be charitable with those who disagree with us. We must respect the lives of all, even those who are misguided in their opinions. But the fact of life's beginnings and the unchanged truths of our faith must always be our guides.

Moreover, we must accompany women who find themselves in untimely and difficult pregnancies to make the choice for life. Many women who have chosen abortion have reported that they felt they had no other option, they felt alone and had no support. We must be active in the lives of these women, accompanying them and offering the care and support they and their children need. This has also been the consistent practice of our church – when people are in need, we take action. That is why I have directed our Catholic Charities to work more closely

with those places like Zelié's Home and Hannah House, Womankind and a myriad of other Pregnancy Resource Centers whose primary objective is to support moms in need both before they give birth and afterward. Life must be protected after birth too! We are a Pro-Life church, which is a greater responsibility than only being opposed to abortion. That is why we also seek to eliminate racism in all its ugly forms, uphold the dignity of those who are at the end of life, and take care of the poorest of the poor, among many other acts of justice and charity.

Let us support moms in need and even walk with them. Let us be compassionate to those moms who have suffered the tragic effects of abortion by ending the unborn lives of their children. We have resources to help these individuals deal with the trauma of their past decisions through programs such as Project Rachel, Rachel's Vineyard and Bethesda House of Mercy. Let us continue our work in defense of life. Our future children are counting on us. And let us hold to the long-standing and consistent practice of the Church, that we do unto others – born and unborn – as we would have done unto us. This is the Golden Rule that will be the measure of our devotion and the test of our commitment to making our world a better place for all.

This week, as we recall the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, I will offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for Life at our Cathedral, joining with the prayers of so many other faithful throughout our diocese for the protection of life, born and unborn. We ask the Lord to hear and answer our prayers.

May God bless you and those you love. Amen.

Your brother in Christ,

Bishop Edward C. Malesic