

Mass for Life: PREPARE to uphold ALL the Unborn

Third Sunday Ordinary Time Cycle C 2017 at St. Paul Cathedral in Yakima, Washington

Isaiah 8:23-9:3; 1Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17; Matthew 4:10-23

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Friends today as we remember this 44th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court ruling titled *Roe vs Wade* I'd like to propose that St. Paul's wish for the Corinthians is my wish for all of you – especially you who are involved in any way in the pro-life movement. What was St. Paul's wish? To quote from today's second reading: "That all of you may agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you."

Why this wish from St. Paul? Perhaps because Chloe – a woman patroness of St. Paul's preaching ministry – has reported to St. Paul that within that early church in Corinth a number of factions have developed. Our second reading notes that some in Corinth claim to be followers of Paul, others of Apollos and still others of Cephas. Rather than getting into an argument of which preacher is the best St. Paul sidesteps this by pointing everyone to the source of all preaching: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Between the lines, St. Paul seems to suggest that there always will be a diversity of ways in uplifting the gospel and that – as long as they unite back to the person and preaching of Christ – they're variations of our Lord himself, the life he led and the message he preached.

There might be a lesson for us today for there are diverse ways of uplifting what Saint John Paul the Second so eloquently termed the Gospel of Life. That diversity here in Central Washington can be seen in the growing network of pregnancy resource centers, the various ways local parishes reach out to women and their children – born and unborn – as well as the various spiritual supports of prayers and retreats supporting the unborn, supporting their mothers, supporting their fathers and even of supporting those who suffer emotional and spiritual damage due to an abortion they or their partner procured.

Recognizing these efforts, two years ago, we bishops of Washington State launched PREPARES. PREPARES stands for Pregnancy and Parenting Support and it represents our Church's coordinated outreach for women and children, organizing wrap-around care for women in emergency pregnancies from the moment of conception to the fifth year of the child's life. It's been my pleasure to chair our working group of Catholic Charities leadership from across the state over these last two years. Often we are able to partner and coordinate with a number of the local and often ecumenically based groups to create a systematic and sequential support system tailored to the needs of the women whom we are reaching. Thus far, we've been able to touch the lives of nearly 700 women with some form of care for themselves, their child and even their surrounding families.

Why this need for diversity of care as support in uplifting the Gospel of Life? Because, today, while much of the nation rightly focuses on the actual *Roe vs. Wade* decision our local efforts as a Church address two very unique conditions here in Central Washington.

The first is this: Washington State holds a very unique position in the history of legalized abortion here in the United States. Washington State is the only state in the United States of America to have legalized abortion BY POPULAR BALLOT. We did this in the 1970 election by passing Referendum 20. All other states with any kind of legalized abortion did so either through a lower court action overturning a local state law or – as in the case of the state of Oregon – legalization of abortion through a legislative act. But Washington State holds the unique and dubious distinction of being the only state where abortion was legalized in a popular vote by a majority of the citizens.

This means that even if *Roe vs. Wade* is overturned – and God willing it will be one day – abortion will remain legal here in Washington State. For us to overturn Referendum 20 means we will need a positive, uplifting and inspiring witness that moves our neighbors to reconsider their support for abortion and see embodied in our lives of service a better, happier and more joyous way.

This is precisely why I am so very appreciative – not only of our collaboration between the Catholic Charities agencies across the state – but for the many positive efforts from a great many local pro-life groups in

supporting the gift of life from the very first moment of conception. It takes all of us together to uplift the gift of life regardless of our faith, our political outlook, our language or our cultural heritage.

That leads me to raise the second unique challenge in uplifting the gift of life and the gift of the unborn. It is this: the overwhelming majority of baptisms, confirmations, first communions and marriages are in the Hispanic community. This is also where most of the pregnancies and births are occurring. Because abortion is the preeminent issue of social justice and anchors all other catholic social teaching it requires that we – as Catholics – find ways to create bonds of trust and welcome so that Hispanic women – especially those whose families are undocumented – can approach us and our partners in this ministry of life without fear. One of the things we've learned at PREPARES these first two years is that often black women and white women in emergency pregnancy face low levels of family support to help in their time of needs. PREPARES volunteers often become the "family companion" making up for the family these women lack. It's a particular form of poverty they face.

Yet working in the Hispanic community, women often do have extended family support systems, so this means that PREPARES volunteers find ways to support the woman and their family in upholding the gift of their unborn child and beginning with them that journey for the first five years of the child's life. This means that in order to protect the unborn we find ourselves walking through the doors of the undocumented since so many of our Hispanic families are in a variety of places with regards to their immigration status.

Thus while there can be a legitimate spectrum of opinions regarding immigration, border control, the importance of English and of cultural integration, a good and faithful Catholic will never use language in public that is harsh, derogatory, or in any way demeaning – especially towards the Hispanic community or the specific people who are undocumented in our midst. Such language – now so prominent in political discourse – undercuts our local efforts to reach out to the unborn and their families, especially in the Hispanic community. Failure to protect the undocumented risks compromising our ability to reach the unborn and their mothers.

Circling back to the stern challenge of St. Paul to the Corinthians in today's second reading, we cannot allow ourselves to become partisan Christians seeing ourselves as sectarian followers of the Cephases, Apolloses, or even the St. Pauls of our day. Regardless of our language or our culture we are one and we are here to uplift the one Gospel – a Gospel of Life – proclaimed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is why we look to Mary and it is why – today – I specifically requested that her image be present in today's Mass for Life. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as we know is the patroness of Mexico. She's also the patroness of the Americas because she's the only apparition recognized by the Church to have occurred in the Americas. She's revered and venerated by so many especially among our undocumented Hispanic Catholics in their lives of uncertainty.

But she's also known to us as the patroness of the pro-life movement. Why? Because of all the many Marian devotions and of all of the Marian apparitions that have graced our church, this apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to San Juan Diego is the only apparition where Mary appears pregnant. Indeed the Aztec symbols of fertility embossed on the fabric of her dress speak to this reality. I might add that the leader of the Knights of Columbus – Carl Anderson – has written a thoughtful book on this apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

I uplift her today for our specific veneration because she embodies the very unique circumstances we face here in the Diocese of Yakima as we uplift the Gospel of Life.

Mary shows us the way. She points us to her Son. She unifies us as our shared mother. She prepares the table. She invites us to Eucharist. She leads us to him so we can follow him to the Father and – animated by the Holy Spirit – give witness to the Gospel of Life. So in gratitude for all the many efforts across Central Washington protecting the unborn and uplifting the gift of life, in devotion I close this homily inviting you to pray with me:

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."