

A Culture of Life

Homily for the 2012 Mass for Life

Monday of the Fourth Week of Ordinary Time: Samuel 5:1-7; Mark 3:22-30

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! Rap artist Nick Cannon has a video on YouTube titled “Can I Live?” Now I don’t subscribe to everything Nick Canon says or does in his personal life. But I cannot help but be struck by his compelling video that tells the true story of Nick’s mother facing an unexpected pregnancy. She’s unmarried and afraid. The film flashes to his mother going to a clinic with protesters outside. But the core body of the video shows Nick’s mom sitting in the waiting room contemplating her choice.

A hidden choir of young children sings:

*I'll always be a part of you
Trust your soul know its always true
If I could talk I would say to you
Can I live?
Can I live?*

Then in a ghost like image the video show Nick Cannon, himself, as a full fledge artist. He’s singing and dancing as a twenty four year old only he’s on the other side, in the future, a future that his frightened and unwed young mother can’t imagine and can’t see. As the video unfolds, Nick Canon’s mom changes her mind while on the table at the very last moment and thus Nick is not aborted but born. Nick’s life unfolds.

Nick, himself, explained the motivation for his video in an interview. “There are a lot of young mothers in need and have had to struggle to raise their children. I just wanted to recognize all the strong women who are raising children on their own like my mother had to do.” The video closes with the 24 year old Cannon hugging his real life mom and thanking her for his life.

Friends, this is why we gather today. As people of faith we hold that every life is held in the hand of God holding beauty and potential in unseen ways. Any interruption of that gift from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death diminishes our culture and lessens the cultural quality of everyone’s life regardless of their faith, their race, their language, their economic class, their social standing, or their way of life.

At my Christmas Eve homily this year I mentioned that the great Walt Disney was once fired from his job because his boss evaluated him as “lacking creativity.” Thomas Edison was once dismissed by a teacher as too dumb to learn. And the great composer Beethoven wrote beautiful music even though he was deaf. And today we know we almost missed the music of Nick Cannon.

We heard an echo of this last Saturday afternoon at our Walk for Life where powerful testimonies helped us recall those who've been impacted by abortion: those women who grieve their choices and those children whose faces we'll never see. This is why the United States bishops placed this day on the Church's liturgical calendar. It's why we vest in white as a sign of life! What gifts have we overlooked? What have we missed?

During the opening weeks our daily Mass readings have come from the Book of Samuel. We've been recalling how Eli the priest, called Samuel the prophet who would anoint David as King. Prophet! Priest! King! Where do we hear this same imagery? In baptism, of course, the basis of the new covenant that leads us to this table – the bloodless sacrifice of bread and wine that becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ!

The trouble with us today is that we look away. We pretend we don't see. We act like we don't believe the cross occurred or was ever redemptive. Here in the Valley we revert to our pre-covenant bloody ways. Warfare and violence, gang banging, and prostitution, drug dealing and depression, unemployment and homelessness, poverty and poor health care, the death penalty and euthanasia are all consequences of our lack of confidence in the covenant. And our willingness to sanction abortion as "legal" in our society is the capstone of our bloody pre-covenant ways.

Taken together, these troubling symptoms remind us that Roe vs. Wade must be reversed not only because of what it does to the unborn, but because of what it does to all of us. As a people we are diminished --- diminished socially, diminished culturally, diminished spiritually, and diminished morally. We are diminished in our capacity to see the way great gifts enter our lives.

But that is why I am so grateful for all of you tonight. You want to see as Eli saw. You want to see as Samuel saw. You want to see what David saw. You want to see as Jesus sees in today's Gospel – casting out the demonic! Thank you for opening yourself to see the truth – the beauty of our teaching that every life is a gift from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

You may be aware that some of our state leaders in Olympia are pressing to pass rules that we must provide insurance coverage for abortion – forcing us to look away from our mission as a Church. If, God forbid, such legislation should pass, the state of Washington would be putting the Catholic Church in the unfortunate position of having to stop including health care coverage in the benefit packages we offer our own employees.

And as bishop of Yakima I want you to know that as a Church we will never stop reminding those we elect to office that they have a responsibility to see what we see: the sacredness of human life. And we will resist any and all efforts to attack our rights of conscience and our religious liberty. On behalf of the unborn we will never stop raising the refrain of the unborn captured in Nick Canon's song: "Can I live? Can I live? Can I live?" Peace be with you.