

Euongelion – Good News for the Gift of Life

Homily for the 2021 Mass for Life at St. Paul Cathedral in Yakima Washington
Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Friends, our Gospel from St. Mark opens with Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum and how everyone was “astonished at his teaching.” Why astonished?

The interpretive key for this Gospel from St. Mark lies 21 verses up with the opening words, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

The Gospel — “Good news” in the original Greek text — comes from the word “euongelion.” The word has imperial Roman connotations.

Scholars note that

messengers of the Roman emperor would go into towns and villages using this same word “euongelion,” sharing the “good news” of the Roman Caesar's latest military conquest.

The evangelist St. Mark turns this phrase “euongelion” upside down. It’s as though St. Mark is



JESUS BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.

saying to his hearers, “That news from the messenger of the Roman emperor — that’s “fake news.” “Euongelion.” The good news is Jesus is Lord and Son of God.

No wonder, then, that twenty-three verses later Jesus heals the man with an unclean spirit. In contrast to the empire ambitions of the Roman Caesar, the evangelist St. Mark casts Jesus as ruler of the interior world — an interior world that conquers physical death on a cross and becomes real in his bodily resurrection. As such, earthly powers with their force and might never have the final word. The final word is Jesus. Jesus who is “euongelion.” Jesus whose word is life.

This “euongelion” marks our annual Mass for Life. PREPARES is the singular initiative of ourselves as Catholic bishops across Washington State to support the gift of life — the life of the unborn and the well-being of their mothers and their families.

PREPARES walks the journey of life from the first moment of conception to the child’s fifth birthday. This last fiscal year alone here in Central Washington PREPARES has trained and matched 51 young moms with seasoned women volunteers as family companions who welcome and support the mom and their child. Over 300 families received wrap around support from Catholic parishes and Catholic Charity agencies with support groups and parenting programs such as “Play and Learn.” Over 5,000 units of assistance from formula to diapers and basic baby supplies were distributed. All this occurred with about 3,000 volunteer hours. COVID-19 put no curb on our outreach support groups to young moms continued via Zoom as well as carefully protocolled visits. PREPARES volunteers received rich Marian spiritual formation with the motherhood of Mary as our interior basis for fostering motherhood among the women we serve.

“Euongelion.” PREPARES threads out the good news of Jesus Christ, animator and Lord of Life. To uplift this joyous “euongelion” is not to deny the hard legal, social and political questions in the aftermath of our own Washington State voting to legalize abortion by popular ballot in 1970. Indeed, precisely because Washington State was the only state to legalize abortion by popular ballot, most like any reversal of the 1973 United States Supreme Court decision, Roe vs. Wade, would mean that abortion would remain legal in Washington State given our political history.

All the more reason to proclaim “euongelion,” the good and beautiful news about the gift of life — the life of the unborn! All the more reason to witness a better way to live — life without abortion and life with the unborn brought into our world. All the more reason to become missionaries of the joys of life even in a pro-choice culture.

I hope you will consider becoming a volunteer and supporting the great ministry of PREPARES on behalf of the unborn and in support of their moms. I hope you will consider a generous financial gift on Valentine’s Day weekend. February 13th and 14th when we launch the first ever statewide collection across all the parishes of Washington State on behalf of the unborn and in support of our efforts with PREPARES.

Like St. Mark who proclaimed a new “euongelion” in the middle of the Roman Empire we do the same. I am so very grateful for the witness of our Catholic bishops across Washington State for our shared witness to the gift of life for the unborn. I am grateful for the skill and professionalism of our Catholic Charities agencies who provide wrap-around services to the unborn and their families. I’m grateful for the hundreds of volunteers across the state who hone their skills, gain new knowledge and deepen their spiritual life on behalf of this gift of life. Euongelion! Good news! That’s what we proclaim at this Mass for Life thanks to you and thanks be to God!

Art: T. De Witt Talmage, 1902, “Jesus Blessing Little Children,” Public Domain.