

Excerpt from the Homily of Most Reverend Joseph F. Naumann, Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas and Chairman of the USCCB Pro-Life Committee

5:30 p.m., Thursday, January 23, 2020

Opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington D.C.

Eons ago – I enjoyed watching the Twilight Zone. For its time, it was considered state of the art science fiction. One entire episode was shot in a hospital room. The doctors and nurses all wore surgical masks to protect the patient from infection. As the show unfolded, it became clear that the patient, whose face was completely bandaged, had been through a series of plastic surgeries attempting to correct a severe disfigurement.

The lead surgeon informed the beleaguered patient that they could only attempt one more surgery. However, the doctor was hopeful this time they would succeed. Most of the episode builds up to this last-chance surgery. In the closing scene, the final surgery had been completed some days ago. Now is the moment of truth. The nurses remove the bandages uncovering the patient's face. The woman is stunningly, drop-dead beautiful.

However, the doctors and nurses shake their heads in disbelief and dismay. They apologize profusely to the patient for their failure as they remove their own surgical masks revealing their own grotesquely hideous appearance. The closing music comes on as you begin to realize that in this fictional Twilight Zone world: Beautiful is ugly and the hideous is gorgeous.

We gather these days for the somber commemoration of the 47th anniversary of tragically flawed Supreme Court twin decisions – Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton. The Court's twisted logic established a so-called right to an inherently evil action, the killing of innocent preborn children. The High Court's 1973 decisions opened the door to a moral Twilight Zone where evil is revered as good.

Sadly, during the past 47 years abortion advocates have become more radical and intolerant. The façade of making abortion safe, legal and rare has been reduced to only keeping it legal. The killing of one's child is exalted as heroic and brave. Even the most modest regulation of abortion facilities for the protection of women's health is vigorously opposed.

Abortion was described by early feminists, Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul, as the ultimate exploitation of women, but in this ethically topsy-turvy Twilight Zone, it is now hailed as the cornerstone of women's rights.

Sadly, in many ways for pro-lifers the days have grown darker. In recent years, abortion advocates have abandoned their slick slogan of "choice". The former proponents of choice now seek to coerce Pro-Life Americans to become complicit in the killing of unborn children as evidenced by demanding tax funded abortions, compelling ministries like the Little Sisters of the Poor to

provide abortifacients in their health plans, and efforts to force Catholic hospitals to provide abortions.

Thankfully, not everything is doom and gloom! In these early days of 2020, there are signs of hope. Despite a biased secular media, decades of persistent pro-life educational efforts have resulted in our nation's youth being more Pro-Life than their parents.

The efforts of more than 2,700 pregnancy resource centers, surrounding with love and practical support more than half of million mothers annually, have helped to steadily and significantly reduce both the number and rate of abortions in our nation over the past 30 years.

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and neighborhoods. While many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level, moms in need are best reached at the local level. We have well over 17, 000 Catholic parishes in the United States. Each parish is best able to identify the local pregnancy help resources that are currently available and to identify the potential gaps.

As Pope Francis reminds us, our parishes are called to be "islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference." I urge you to inquire with your local pregnancy resource center how you can help. Lives that we may not currently be able to protect by the law, we can rescue through love.

Our goal is not only to identify gaps or areas with insufficient resources, but then to take concrete steps to expand the help available to mothers, not only during the pregnancy but for months and even years after the child's birth. We

want to do everything possible to help both mother and child, not only survive but thrive.

With fourteen other Bishops from Kansas, Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska, I met with Pope Francis last week. I shared with him that the United States Bishops in our November (2019) meeting had reaffirmed that protecting the unborn remains a preeminent priority. I told him we received some criticism, even being accused of insulting the Pope.

Pope Francis appeared stunned. He asked: Why? I said because we called the protection of the unborn a preeminent priority. His immediate response was: It is a preeminent priority. Pope Francis said if we do not defend life, no other rights matter.

The Holy Father said that abortion is first a human rights issue. Of course, our Faith enlightens and motivates our concern for the unborn, but protecting lives of unborn children is not a matter of religious faith but upholding the most fundamental of human rights. Pope Francis was aware of the March for Life in the United States and was delighted to know the anticipated large numbers of pilgrims, especially the participation of so many young people.

The Holy Father asked me to thank especially those who work in our pregnancy resource centers for accompanying women with difficult pregnancies, for being part of these islands of mercy.

When you are appointed a bishop, you are invited to choose an episcopal motto. Most often, the motto is a phrase from the scriptures. In my case, it

is: *Life Will Be Victorious*. It is not from the scriptures but from Pope John Paul's *The Gospel of Life*!

I chose this motto because of my long involvement with the Church's Pro-Life apostolate. It expresses a confidence that God will bless our efforts and with His divine assistance we will succeed in restoring a respect for the sanctity of each and every human life, no matter age or stage of development, no matter race or ethnicity, no matter mental or physical abilities.

I chose it even more because I pray my ministry as a bishop is one that brings hope to others, a hope not based on human wisdom or strength, but on the love of God revealed in the embryo conceived in the womb of Mary, the baby born in the cave in Bethlehem, the man who through His ministry freed many from the enslavements of sin, who ultimately gave His life for us on Calvary and who vanquished the power of death through His Resurrection, the ultimate victory of life.