

# A Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities

Ten years ago the Second Vatican Council repeated clearly and succinctly the basic principle of respect for human life.

For God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner that is worthy of man. Therefore, from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.

The Church's insistence on the dignity of the human person is grounded in a tradition that sees whatever is opposed to human life, such as abortion or euthanasia, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as some forms of human experimentation, and whatever diminishes human dignity, such as poverty and injustice, as moral evils and an affront to God, the Creator of all.

The Church has a duty to speak in behalf of human life and to encourage a just social order and a system of justice that protects basic human rights, especially the right to life. Governments must also protect human rights. Laws that permit the arbitrary destruction of human life — before as well as after birth — are unjust and immoral.

Recognition of the dignity of the human person, made in the image of God, lies at the very heart of our individual and social duty to respect human life. It is this which causes us to state forcefully once again that abortion and euthanasia are violations of the right to life and are morally evil.

There is widespread disrespect for the sanctity of human life in our nation today. It is evidenced in many ways, and especially in the destruction through abortion of more than one million unborn children each year. Disrespect for the sanctity of life is also evident in current efforts to persuade people that euthanasia is acceptable. Responding to such abuses of the sanctity of life, the Bishops of the United States adopted a Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities at their annual meeting last November. This Pastoral Plan seeks to activate all the resources of the Church in order to check the trend toward permissive abortion. It calls on all the Church's agencies, institutions and people to take part in a comprehensive effort of education, moral and pastoral guidance, and social action which will restore respect for human life and establish a system of justice in which the basic right to life is protected at every stage and in every circumstance.

The pastoral plan addresses itself to the practical task of amending the Constitution in order to make possible laws that protect the unborn. It invites the cooperation of all Americans, regardless of sex, race, religion or

ethnic origin. Protection of the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" has always been one of our nation's most important commitments. Reaffirmation of that commitment is a responsibility of all Americans.

Thus, the pastoral plan recognizes the value and necessity of local pro-life action groups which are separate from the Church and involve the efforts of all who are committed to the value of human life, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

As we approach once again the date on which the Supreme Court of the United States issued its decisions in 1973 denying protection to unborn children, we urge a renewal of commitment and a resurgence of systematic efforts to persuade our nation's leaders to restore the protection of the Constitution to the unborn.

We urge Catholics to move out into the society and invite their neighbors, colleagues and friends to take part in this most important effort.

I urge all Catholics in the Rochester area to participate in the annual March for Life and Prayer Service organized by the Rochester Right-to-Life Committee (Saturday, January 24, 2:00 p.m., Washington Square) to demonstrate our common solidarity and resolve in this bicentennial year to become once again "one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all."

# Papal Reflections: Time, Mary, Peace

Following is the text of Pope Paul VI's message on the World Day of Peace.

Three subjects, three thoughts nourish our New Year's meditation today.

The first one is the thought of the civil calendar which begins with a day, not different from the others which follow one another and record the course of our present life, life in time. The fact that the numbering of the days begins again with a number one that inaugurates a new year and that this period of the solar cycle to which we give the name "year" resumes its punctual and inexorable revolution in solar space, makes us think of a great and indefinable cosmic and philosophical reality, which pervades our present existence: it is time! And

what is time? It is the movement of a created being, it is the transient and precarious life of things that do not have in themselves the principle of their own being, and therefore do not possess immobility, eternity. It is a continual fading away, to find oneself again in a subsequent state: "Cotidie morior," I die every day, St. Paul said. It is the precariousness of our existence, which seeks escape from its radical deficiency in motion.

This is a difficult meditation, which has strained the thought of the greatest minds but which is easily expressed in the religious outlook, ours, when we remember the Lord's words: "Are there not 12 hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble." Words in which there is the whole teaching that we must be anxious to remember: time is precious, time passes, time is a phase of experiment with regard to our decisive and definitive fate. Our future and eternal destiny depends on the proof we give of faithfulness to our duties. Time is a gift from God; it is a question posed by God's love to our free and it can be said, fateful answer. We must be sparing of time, in order to use it well, in the intense activity of our life of work, love and suffering. Idleness or boredom have no place in the life of a Christian! Rest, yes, if necessary, but always with a view to vigilance, which only on the last day will open to a light on which the sun will never set.

Our second thought is about the festivity to which this first day of the liturgical year is dedicated, the motherhood of Mary, the Mother of God. It is, as it were, a conclusion, a crowning of the Christmas mystery. A beautiful, rich, sweet subject. There are so many things to remember, so many to celebrate, so many to enjoy at this first liturgical event which leads us once again along our path in that time that is

still granted to us to live of this eve of eternity, which our present life is. The person of Mary, as she is presented to us in the Gospel, and in Catholic worship, in her immaculate, virginal figure, in her humility and her poverty, in her simplicity, is so sweet and so human, so innocent, such as we will never find in any other creature. And in the liturgy of today she is presented to us in her incomparable, ineffable and, for us, indispensable mystery, that of the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Saviour.

Here we must make a resolution, a commitment! We will take with us, in our thought, in our devotion, in our confidence, the thought, the cult, the love of the Blessed Virgin, in every day of the year, as a "mirror", an example of every human and Christian virtue, as the pure and sweet woman who accompanies us on our tiring pilgrimage, as a mother so great-hearted as to contain within her the fullness of love of Christ, her Son, of God the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and then love of mankind, of the whole Church, of each of us. **Mater pulchrae dilectionis**, the enlightened devotion of the Church calls her; let us never forget. (And let us take care to reread what chapter VIII of the great Constitution on the Church, **Lumen Gentium**, of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, sums up for us on theology and devotion to Mary. Mary deserves this filial interest of ours; and we have only to draw benefit and hope from it.)

And the third thought cannot but be, as you can imagine, the one that has, as every year, brought us all here, or to various churches in Rome, namely the thought of Peace. Today is the World Day of Peace: a day devoted to the exaltation of peace, the admonition to peace, reflection on the frailty and the unique preciousness of peace.

We do not need to stress these concepts: you know how near they are to our heart, because we have set them forth repeatedly to your attention. We entrusted them again recently to the Message sent, for the celebration of the Day of Peace of this year, which is just beginning, to all Government leaders and Rulers of Peoples, to those responsible at the various levels of social and international life, to the followers of the great Religions, to believers, to the faithful sons of the Church. In it we spoke of the real arms of peace, the ones that ensure civil society its serene stability by driving home more and more deeply in men's conscience the sense of universal brotherhood. We indicated once more the dangers, the anxieties, the sparks that can bring fatal destruction to a world that is, unfortunately, still founded on precarious balances, when not on latent or open hostilities. We described as if in a prophetic vision the forward progress of peace advancing "armed

only with an olive branch" but, at the same time, being the one irreplaceable guarantee of the progress of civilization. And scrutinizing anxiously the not always encouraging symptoms of the time in which we live, we made a heartfelt appeal for peace, "armed only with godness and love".

Today, at the dawn of the new year, we nourish the firm hope that this progress will advance with more certain firmness, at a quicker pace, encouraged on its path by larger numbers of fervent and eager supporters. Peace is possible, Peace is a duty for us, Peace is necessary. There is entering into the conscience of peoples the firm and decided conviction that it is impossible to construct anything effective and lasting for the good of man unless in mutual concord, in respect of reciprocal rights, in the patient experiment of constructive talks and just sincere negotiations. And looking at what is happening on this day on which — as its joyful and ever wider echoes reach us every year — in the Capitals of the various States of the world, at the seats of the international Organizations, in ecclesial communities, civil and religious leaders stop for a pause of meditated reflection, nay more, of common prayer, then deep joy fills our heart. Here we have the real arms of Peace, which is gaining ground, though with difficulty and slowly, and progressing in the hearts of men, enlightened by God's light.

From this Chair of truth and peace, the authentic interpreter of the Message of the Son of God, we repeat our appeal, our invitation. To those in whose hands are the fates of Peoples, or rather the life or death of millions of brothers, we repeat our passionate exhortation: the innocent and imploring eyes of children, of the poor, of those suffering in body or in spirit from the wounds of war, beseech them, the judgment of history is lying in wait for them, but, more severe and infallible, God's judgment awaits them. Let no effort be left untried to settle disagreements, overcome difficulties and promote human and social progress, especially where need is greatest and difficulties most pressing.

But we address individuals, too: you who are listening to us in this devout and luminous gathering, those who are connected with us by radio, the persons who form the connective tissue of society, the "man in the street". We are all responsible for Peace, we are all called to collaborate for Peace, making our personal contribution to the building-up of a society based on love, in our environment, our profession, and daily relations. We are all called to fight with the powerful arms of love and brotherhood for the establishment, safeguarding and diffusion of Peace around us. Let each one begin by himself; the number will grow enormously; it is a work to which no one must remain extraneous.