

Secular order sponsors Mass to atone for abortion deaths

A cry was heard at Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation: Rachel bewailing her children; no comfort for her, since they are no more. Jeremiah 31:15

By Teresa A. Parsons

Historians estimate that the Holy Innocents may have numbered fewer than 30. Yet the mental images evoked by Matthew's gospel account of the young boys' slaughter by King Herod never fails to arouse a shudder of horror from congregations on December 28.

In contrast, pro-life groups point out that the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion has claimed millions of innocent lives. In atonement for what they regard as a contemporary American holocaust, nearly 70 people gathered at St. John of Rochester Church in Fairport this past December 28 for a Mass in reparation for abortion.

The Mass was sponsored by the Glory of Yahweh chapter of Third Order Franciscans, a group of nearly 40 lay persons, clergy and religious dedicated to living in the secular world according to the rule established by St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century.

Everyone is an aborter in some fashion, according to Father Anthony Mugavero, celebrant of the Mass and a member of the Glory of Yahweh chapter. "All of us are guilty of stopping something in our own lives," he said. "All of us have dark places where we feel threatened, afraid or uncomfortable."

But the elimination of countless unborn lives "is a crime that only heaven knows how much it weeps over," he said. "These children are your brothers and my brothers, your sisters and my

sisters. They have been created for a special reason. They are unique and irreplaceable.

"My friends, brothers and sisters of ours are missing. They are not here and they should be," he added. "Think of the people that are close to you. What if they were no longer? What if they had never been?"

The Church ought to demonstrate a standing commitment to accepting responsibility for any unwanted child, Father Mugavero

said. He also urged those present to take some kind of action, and to ask their pastors to pray and to speak about protecting unborn life.

"It is Jesus in the wombs of those dear women who go to the abortionist, he said. "What are we doing for Jesus?"

This is the first such Mass the Franciscan group has sponsored, although they have long devoted private prayer and discussion to life

issues, according to chapter president Martin Lynch. Through their private reflections, members decided to invite other opponents of abortion to join with them in a public act of reparation.

"Part of our calling as secular Franciscans is to have a real and profound respect for the Incarnation and all that touches on," Lynch said. "Jesus in a very real way is being assaulted and attacked through the unfortunate and terrible abortion experience in our country. As Franciscans, we wanted to do something on a spiritual level at least, to repair some of the damage being done to our Lord."

Founded nearly a decade ago, the Glory of Yahweh Chapter has been formally recognized by the Third Order of Franciscans for the past five years. The rule they follow emphasizes prayer and assistance to the weak and needy. "What's weaker and more needy than an unborn baby?" Lynch asked.

The group plans to sponsor another Mass in reparation for abortion on January 25. Further details have not yet been set.

"We're anticipating that this will be something that will catch on and that the Lord will show us through prayer what direction it should take from here," Lynch said.

Teens consider

Continued from Page 3

"It's just a natural consequence of life."

Their parents, on the other hand, might be more reluctant to approve. Historically, the Catholic Church opposed cremation because it was used by certain European societies, including the Freemasons, as an act of disbelief in immortality and the resurrection.

The tradition may have even earlier roots established during the persecutions of early Christians, when the bodies of martyrs were sometimes burned and their ashes scattered as a gesture of contempt.

Gradually, cremation has assumed a more positive aspect as American funeral customs have become increasingly materialistic and have tended to emphasize the importance of the body in what is now regarded as less than Christian fashion.

The Church formally reconsidered its teaching in 1963, when the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith instructed bishops that cremation was permissible so long as it

was not intended to show contempt for the Church or for its teachings regarding the resurrection.

The Code of Canon Law now states that "the Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching."

In explaining the Church's traditional point of view to students, Father Heyman noted that the language Jesus spoke had no word to distinguish between body and soul. Therefore, when He spoke of the body living forever, He meant that the whole person would never die.

"Years ago, people believed that you put the body in the casket and put the casket in the ground and at the resurrection at the end of time, that same body would be restored," Father Heyman said. "We believe in the resurrection of the body. . . . We do not believe that this corporeal body will come back. Resurrection is a transformation, a complete change, a re-working in the light of the Lord. It's the difference between resuscitation and resurrection."

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What are some ways to help a child who has lost a parent?

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