

RESPECT LIFE ISSUES IV: “JUST THE FACTS MA’AM”

Thoroughly exasperated with the presidential campaign, I skipped watching the final debate. As it happens, it was the only time that the abortion issue was raised. There is a tremendous amount of misinformation regarding the reality of abortion, and rather than getting mired in the weeds, the facts have been and always will be the best defense in the protection of life. Recall Sgt. Joe Friday in *Dragnet*- “Just the facts ma’am.” While one can rightfully claim that the vast majority of abortions take place in the earliest weeks of pregnancy, this does not diminish in any way that late-term abortion remains a gruesome reality that occurs in our nation. Every single abortion is tragic, whenever it occurs, and it is horrific to even describe the procedure in writing, but it is important for people to know the truth. In a dilation and extraction abortion, the doctor delivers a substantial portion of the living child outside his mother’s body—the entire head in a head-first delivery or the trunk past the navel in a feet-first delivery—then proceeds to crush the skull or remove the brain by suction. While states have varying laws regulating third trimester abortions, seven states and the District of Columbia have no time limit whatsoever.

The pro-choice lobby has been quite successful in shifting the language of the discussion to “rights,” speaking of “painful decisions that can only be made between a woman and her doctor.” More often than not, the reality of what is actually happening in the procedure is conveniently ignored. No meaningful discussion can dispute that with abortion, a developing human life is suddenly ended. I understand that Secretary Clinton responded by saying, “there *can be* restrictions in the very end of the third trimester,” (my emphasis) but as author Daniel Payne from *The Federalist* rightfully noted in an article following the debate: “Clinton carefully avoiding saying there *should be* restrictions at the very end of the third trimester.” She is on record that she “can support a ban on late-term abortions, including partial-birth abortions, so long as the *health and life* of the mother is protected.” But again, notice the two exceptions. The phrase “health and life of the mother” strips these restrictions away, defined in such broad terms as to include “psychological and emotional health.” Generally, that is how abortion “exceptions” work in practice.

I read articles by debate “fact-checkers” who inexplicably claimed that Donald Trump was incorrect with his assertion that this procedure could take place right up until delivery. One wrote, “Only 1.2 percent of abortions—about 12,000 a year— take place after 21 weeks.” The L.A. times fact checkers wrote: “Donald Trump offers graphic description of later-term abortion, but such procedures are extremely rare.” *Politico* fact-checked, negatively characterizing Trump’s claims, though they conceded in the end: “Technically Trump is right that in a handful of states, abortions may be performed late in pregnancy. But late-term abortions are exceedingly rare.” All three claims are irrelevant to his argument. Trump never denied the relative rarity of the procedure— partial-birth abortion happens about 5,000 times annually. His point was that Hillary Clinton staunchly favors late-term abortion rights. Euphemisms cannot shield us from the truth.

Fetology and ultrasound technology have made it possible to see the true humanity of a fetus in the womb. In this era of ever-present media resources, there is no legitimate excuse for people to remain ignorant on this count. Predictably, the debate turns to rights, and to “deeply personal choices” in which the government should be left out, etc. The avoidance of the word “abortion” in most discussions is itself most telling. The reality is painful and the facts are graphic. But it is impossible to remove politely the reality from our consciousness. I simply cannot drive by the corner of Vandalia St. and University Ave. without thinking about what goes on in that building. At the same time, I know that on the opposite corner exists **Abria Pregnancy Resources**, providing hope to women in need, without judgment, but only with open and loving arms willing to help them make the right choice to carry their children to term. The real debate about abortion will be won only one way—through love. We must love the women in need more than anyone else. Period— end of discussion.

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that the object of the will’s choice is the *possible* good, **not** the *impossible* good: “Now whatever is done by us, is possible to us. Therefore we must say that choice is only of possible things.” (*Summa Theologica* I-II q.13, a.5) Applying this to the election, sadly I think many more people are voting to *prevent* a candidate from being elected than they are voting for a candidate to win, that is choosing whom they believe will be the *least bad* choice, for lack of a better term. Some have doubts about Mr. Trump’s recent pro-life

conversion, and those concerns may be well founded. But there can no doubt whatsoever about Secretary Clinton's hardened position. Every morally good act (cf. Catechism #1750-1761) includes three elements: the object (what is done), the intention (why it is done) and the circumstances (the when, where, how it is done).

Are you struggling with your ballot choices this year? Believe me, you are not alone. Not all moral issues are morally equivalent. Catholic Social Teaching anchors the Catholic commitment to defend human life and other human rights, from conception until natural death, in the fundamental obligation to respect the dignity of every human being as a child of God. Catholics are urged to form their consciences in light of our faith, and then make the best, even if imperfect, decision about candidates for office. Fully aware that the choices this year involve seriously flawed candidates on any number of counts, let us never forget – whomever is elected on Tuesday, November 8, Jesus Christ will still be Lord on November 9!

- I returned to the parish of my first assignment (1989-91), St. Joseph's in West St. Paul, to speak to their youth group about the Year of Mercy. While I clearly felt my middle-age, I was delighted to interact with the youth, something that I do far too infrequently. They very much impressed me.
- I am grateful to all who turned out in support of the 175th anniversary of the first Mass at the Chapel of St. Paul. It was so fitting to honor the memory of **Fr. Lucien Galtier** and our founding members. Count me in for the bicentennial in 2041; I'll drive in from my retirement cabin on Lake Superior!
- Baby boom? Well, not exactly, but the number of births seems to be trending slightly upward, and due to recent immigrant arrivals, the number of unwed births is leveling off. Still, out-of-wedlock births to U.S.-born women has doubled since 1984, sitting at 42%. We must inculcate to our youth a healthy view of marriage and help them to embrace it as a desirable step in their lives.
- Two Catholic Cathedrals in England will be lit red during the month of November in order to draw attention to the plight of persecuted Christians. We must never forget the tremendous hardships Christians are experiencing, especially in the Middle East.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector