

Third Sunday Ordinary Time  
January 26-27, 2019

*Crying out to heaven for Justice.*

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4;4:14-21

“Do not be sad, and do not weep.” Six centuries before Jesus, Ezra and Nehemiah were signs of hope in the midst of turmoil. The people knew that the Law had not been kept faithfully. Yes, they needed to repent, but they also needed to see hope for the future. Like many Catholics, I want to believe these words, but now find it extremely difficult to do.

Our Gospel reading today calls us to advocate for those most in need, for God has sent us “*to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.*” This certainly applies to the most vulnerable in our society, the unborn child.

This past Tuesday, our Cathedral was packed as people gathered from all across our state to offer prayerful witness to the sanctity of human life. Many of them were young people, just as I had experienced a few days earlier in Washington D.C. It was a testament to the courageous people who have passed the torch to a new generation. But my joy soon turned to sadness and anger, for 1,223 miles away from here, at the corner of State St. & Washington Ave. Albany, NY, it was a very different scene.

There, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a self-described Catholic, proudly signed into law one of the most expansive abortion rights bills in U.S. history. January 22 was no coincidence—it was the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, one of the most divisive U.S. Supreme Court decisions in history. This was a deliberate “piling on in the end zone” to faithful Catholics as well as people of good will all across his state, and indeed the nation.

Our second reading taught us: “God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body.” That is the ideal; it is most certainly not the situation today. We experience deep division, sewn in part by those who

thumb their noses at infallible Church teaching with respect to the sanctity of human life. New York's abortion law cries out to heaven. It:

- Permits late-term abortion up to the due date to preserve the health of the mother. Previously, the life of the mother had to be at risk. Such a "health" exception has been broadly interpreted by the courts<sup>1</sup> to include age, economic, social and emotional factors.
- removes any legal penalty for a domestic violence attack against an unborn child
- eliminates protections for babies born accidentally in an abortion

In his landmark 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II framed his teaching based upon the "unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine," declaring that:

...abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.<sup>2</sup>

He added: "No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church."

Saint Luke relates that he committed his thoughts to writing "so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received." We teach so that others may realize the certainty of what they have received. Besides teaching, we also have a duty to reprove and correct.

Governor Cuomo even had the audacity to add: "I am directing that New York's landmarks be lit in pink to celebrate this achievement and shine a bright light forward for the rest of the nation to follow." He wanted to **celebrate** by lighting the 408-foot spire of One World Trade Center.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Doe vs. Bolton* 410 US 179, 1973)

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 25 March 1995, # 62 (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, #25)

That building replaced the Twin Towers where 2,606 innocent people were murdered on 9/11. Two huge pools mark the spots of the former towers. All the names of those who died that day are inscribed, including in eleven cases, adding the phrase “and her unborn child.” And he dared to use that site to celebrate this evil law and proclaim it as a symbol for the rest of the nation to follow. **We will not** follow you, Governor, not today, not this week, not ever!

Just as faithful Catholics have a right to hear the truth, so too do wayward ones have need to hear it. Having first done his due diligence, I plead with the bishop who has proper jurisdiction in this case, to admonish the governor that he has placed his immortal soul in jeopardy. May he use every means at his disposal, including the Church’s Canon Law, to instruct him that he is **prohibited** from receiving Holy Communion because he is **obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin**.

The purpose of canonical sanctions is not to use them as a weapon, but rather to administer them as medicine for the soul, alerting the individual to the grave situation into which his or her actions has led them. God does not desire the death of the sinner but that he repent, and this remains the fervent hope and prayer of every Christian.

If Church leaders stand by idly and do or say nothing, the scandal worsens, the cancer spreads, the faithful lose heart and the **little remaining credibility** of the Church will be squandered. For decades, church leaders have tried to find common ground wherever possible with politicians. To some extent, I have agreed with the strategy, seeing it as a noble endeavor to engage others in dialogue on key issues. But it seems abundantly clear that the strategy has largely been an abject failure.

So, how do we live our faith in an increasingly hostile society? Tolerance has been replaced with shaming. If you hold fast to unpopular truths, you will be shamed by those who disagree with you.

Do not fear the ridicule you will receive when standing up for life. Do not fear the misunderstanding when some will accuse you of disrespect for women or for freedom. Do not believe it.

I most heartily encourage you to think about setting aside Fridays as a day of abstinence from meat products, not just during Lent, but throughout the entire year, and to do so in honor of your witness to life.

I began doing this perhaps 15 years ago and have never regretted it. Fridays are different; it is the day that Jesus paid the ultimate price on account of our sins.

Notwithstanding the sins of the past, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Lord led the people back to their homeland once more. He desires to do so once again. This is our duty; this is our call. Each one of us plays a crucial role in transmitting all that we believe to the next generation.

Nearly 54 years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a powerful homily on courage in Selma, Alabama. He said:

A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.<sup>3</sup>

May God grant us and our church leaders the courage to do what is right, to take a stand, not counting the cost. And May God's grace transform and convert the hearts of those who have strayed from the truth about the sanctity of innocent human life in the womb.

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<sup>3</sup> March 8, 1965 in Selma, Alabama, delivered the day after "Bloody Sunday," on which civil rights protesters were attacked and beaten by police on Edmund Pettus Bridge.