

It has been an historic week in our nation, during which once again we have witnessed the peaceful transition of authority from one presidential administration to the next. Whether in Philadelphia on March 4, 1797 between George Washington and John Adams, or in 1801 when Thomas Jefferson became the first president to receive a peaceful transition from someone of a rival political party, all the way until or this past Friday in Washington DC, this has occurred.

We all desire peace in our land, and yet it is painfully obvious that in so many ways, we are a divided nation. For 70 congressional leaders to boycott an inauguration is unprecedented, not to mention yesterday's large rallies held in Washington CD and other cities, including right here.

Today marks the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that, more than any in recent history, has bitterly divided this nation. So what is our proper response? To me, it may be summed up in three words: clarity, charity and transcendency. We need to be clear in our conviction, share that with true love, avoiding all bitterness, and realize that we cannot achieve our goals on our own. Clarity, charity and transcendency.

Cardinal Dolan of New York invited all Catholics to join in the '9 Days for Life' prayer campaign, reproduced on today's bulletin cover. He said, "Together, our prayers and actions can witness to the dignity of the human person."<sup>1</sup> He said: "We're praying for a lot of things this month, including racial harmony, Christian unity, and the protection of all human life," adding that it is "a great way to put our faith into action."

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Chair of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Every life has dignity, be it the elderly man or woman whose health is rapidly deteriorating; the child in the womb with Down Syndrome, 90% of whose lives are taken before they are born; the middle aged woman stricken with breast cancer in the prime of her life. So many experience suffering and the manner in which we treat the least among us reflect how our life in Christ will be seen.

Do we know Jesus Christ enough to see his reflection in the wounded lives of those around us, perhaps even in our own wounds? At times do we even question our own dignity as human beings? Each day of the novena treats a different aspect of respecting the dignity of the human person—from the beginning of life to its natural end. I will bless the participants leaving on buses for Washington this Tuesday, but 9 Days for Life participants are invited to make a kind of ‘virtual pilgrimage.’

This consistent pro-life message, combined with our efforts to assist women in need has clearly contributed in part to a lowering of the overall abortion rate in this nation. But we have stalled upon a staggering plateau, with just over 1 million abortions annually in the United States, roughly the population of San Jose, CA, the nation’s 10<sup>th</sup> largest city. Many women suffer that loss—often in silence, reflecting back on decisions from years ago.<sup>2</sup>

Yet we continue to see many threats to life and violence against it. We cannot look the other way; our voices must be heard. When concluding his apostolic visit the United States in 2015, Pope Francis remarked:

Jesus says in the Scriptures: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”. Your care for me and your generous welcome are a sign of your love for Jesus and your faithfulness to him. So too is your care for the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. USCCB website for “9 Days for Life: FAQ”

poor, the sick, the homeless and the immigrant, your defense of life at every stage, and your concern for family life. In all of this, you recognize that Jesus is in your midst and that your care for one another is care for Jesus himself.”<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added)

Despite what some paint as negative, the Church does not turn her back on women, but firmly holds to the conviction that we are servants and stewards of life and not its arbiters.

The proper respect for the dignity of human life at its earliest stages is predicated upon our belief that all life is a gift from God. There is no such thing as an unwanted child, even if one is unplanned. If we pastors in the Church fail to instill this to our young people in our Catholic schools, Religious Education programs, and from our pulpits, then we will have failed in one of our most fundamental duties. And the same holds true for all parents.

Today’s prophecy from the Book of Isaiah contains several passages in which the mysterious figure of the Servant is introduced.

Christians see in this prophecy a foreshadowing of a Messiah. In one text, the Servant’s vocation will be not only the restoration of Israel, but also the conversion of the world.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 49:1,5 reads, “The LORD called me from birth, from my mother’s womb he gave me my name...and I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord.”

The lessons this weekend are sobering, and many challenges remain in our nation. We will not tire in the battle for the protection of human life, nor be deterred in the face of criticism. Let us never respond to criticism with invective, but pray for the grace to reach out in all charity, truth and humility, mindful that many voices are competing to be heard. Please Lord; grant that the voice of reason and truth may stand out. And may we always above all, witness to the joy of the Gospel by all that we say and do.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis at Philadelphia International Airport, 27 September 2015

<sup>4</sup> New American Bible, footnote to Isaiah 49:6