

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time
January 20-21, 2018

"Whose Lives Matter?"

Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

A culture of life begins early and begins at home. We must strive to inculcate a tremendous respect for life in the womb, as well as care and concern for women who face tragic choices. The Church has been on the front lines with respect to standing up for innocent life in the womb since January 22, 1973. It is a multi-faceted approach that includes education, advocacy, assistance and above all prayer. I wish to address a topic that has slipped under the radar, namely the connection between pre-natal screening and abortion.

Many people born with Down Syndrome can live full, healthy lives, with an average lifespan of around 60 years. I saw a very disturbing article about this issue in Iceland. While obviously a different society, it is important to understand the thinking that is prevalent.

In an interview following a CBS News report about the virtually non-existent birth rate in Iceland for babies with Down Syndrome, a counselor who works with women considering abortion in the case of fetal abnormalities said she tells mothers: "This is your life. You have the right to choose how your life will look like. We don't look at abortion as a murder. We look at it as a thing that we ended."¹

Take just a moment to consider.... "a thing that we ended." This is how some characterize a life in the womb. Other countries aren't lagging too far behind Iceland in abortion rates in such circumstances, typically in 2/3 of the cases or more.²

I cannot pretend to know the many challenges of parenthood, especially in the case of children with special needs; yet, without

¹ Online article "Iceland Close to Becoming First Country where No Down Syndrome Children are Born," by Dave Maclean, 16 August 2017 in www.independent.co.uk

² Statistic taken from an online article "What Kind of Society do We Want to Live in?" www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland/ August 15, 2017 According to the most recent data available, the United States has an estimated abortion rate of 67 percent (1995-2011); in France it's 77 percent (2015); and Denmark, 98 percent (2015).

question some of the most amazing families I have ever encountered are ones who have lovingly welcomed such a child into their home. They know it will be difficult but believe that God is calling them to love even more deeply than before.

Just this year in Minnesota, a young woman named Mikayla Holmgren competed in a Miss Minnesota USA pageant, reportedly the first ever to do so with Down Syndrome.

We hear in the prophecy of Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” (Jeremiah 1:5) What kind of society do we want to live in? How prepared are we to say that this life is somehow less valuable than another due to a pre-natal diagnosis? What does it say about a culture in which these decisions are made? All human life is equally precious. We do not distinguish based upon health or intelligence.

There is some good news to share, a point of light. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act with a bi-partisan vote of 241-183. Cardinal Dolan spoke on behalf of the U.S. Bishops and said:

"As Chairman of the United States Bishops' Committee, I offer gratitude and praise to the House of Representatives for passing the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act (H.R. 4712). This common-sense legislation offers a simple and widely supported proposition: a child born alive following an abortion should receive the same degree of care to preserve her life and health as would be given to any other child born alive at the same gestational age.³

The Cardinal called upon the Senate to follow suit. Time will tell. That such a law would even be necessary is itself a statement, but this is a solid first step.

³ USCCB Website Statement, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, 20 January 2018

In the passage from the Book of the prophet Jonah, Nineveh repented; an entire city had changed its ways. Let us never tire of working and praying for such a change in attitude in our own society.

We must be informed, see the deeper realities that lie beneath the surface, and pray that God's light will illumine a path forward. Every time we witness in truth and charity, someone may begin to re-think their logic, reconsider their presuppositions, and be open to the light of truth. May we never tire of defending human life, from the moment of conception through natural death.