

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.**  
Vigil for Life 2021 Holy Hour  
28 January 2021



Two Sundays ago we heard the narrative in St. John's Gospel about the call of the first disciples. Andrew and John heard John the Baptist tell them that Jesus was the Lamb of God and they followed Him.

Jesus turned and watching them said: "What are you looking for?" To which they responded with another question: "Where are you staying?"

The Lord's response was very simple: "Come, and you will see."

The disciples must make a decision. They have to break with John the Baptist, the Pharisees, and all others in as much as they lead away from Jesus Christ. Having heard the invitation to "come and see", they must adhere completely to Him. We notice that it all begins with a personal witness. John the Baptist points out the Savior: "Behold the Lamb of God". That moment, immortalized in many works of art, especially in the magnificent marble sculpture of John the Baptist made by Donatello, is really a model for all of us. The Christian vocation is always one of indicating the Lamb of God and showing the path to Him.

Jesus asks the disciples who follow Him: "What are you looking for?" Is that not the question posed to every believer? Do we not make the response every day in our pilgrimage to eternal life? Despite our weakness, failings, and inattention, we offer every morning all that we do, our thoughts, speech, and prayers to the Lord.

The disciples respond: "where are you staying". It is a statement of intention. They want to have a part of His life and ministry. He invites them to join Him and they will see. He invites them to be with Him and to experience precious time alone with Him. It is an invitation to intimacy with the Lord. Personal contact with Jesus Christ is essential to Christian life, to the Apostolate, and certainly to ordained ministry in His Name. We, too, can sing with the Psalmist: "taste and see how good the Lord is".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 34.9.

The call of the Apostles is also a model for the Christian vocation. "The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is 'sent out' into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways. 'The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well.' Indeed, we call an apostolate 'every activity of the Mystical Body' that aims 'to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth.'"<sup>2</sup>

Tonight, Sisters and Brothers, we gather in prayer for the respect of life, the healing of those in error, and for a renewal of our ability to be effective witnesses of His truth which leads to everlasting life.

Essential to understand where Jesus "lives"; to become a disciple of the Christ is enter into the same relationship of love, which He maintains with the Father. Come and see is to have the experience of the Christ and communion with the Father. The insistence is on remaining in Him and sharing His abundant life. "The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture."<sup>3</sup>

Is that not why we are gathered in this magnificent Basilica or praying at home in union with this nationwide effort to reaffirm the dignity of every human person from conception to natural death? It is a tragic anniversary that gathers us, because we recognize an error in a decision by the Supreme Court that failed to recognize that dignity. They have been mistaken before. The Dred Scott decision would be one striking example. Another similar one was made by our founding fathers in the 3/5 compromise which recognized 3/5 of the slave population in the calculations for seats in the House of Representatives. Men, and they were all men, would count 3/5 of other human beings instead of counting all of them.

We make mistakes. Roe vs. Wade cost 65 million lives. We mourn that loss and the grief of millions of mothers and fathers wounded by their decision. We want to share their pain and hold out means for healing. We lament that human life is not accorded the dignity intended by our loving Creator.

You and I strive to correct that error in many ways. Tonight we reaffirm our willingness to treat every other person with his or her dignity as one created in the image and likeness of Almighty God. We can disagree on issues, but we never descend to name-calling, abrasiveness, or a lack of respect.

We use the forms of political action that are open to us. The March for Life that would normally crowd the streets of this Capital will be virtual tomorrow, but it will be a reminder that change and conversion are possible. We will continue to state the moral

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<sup>2</sup> CCC 863.

<sup>3</sup> St. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 1

principles which determine our stance, as Archbishop Naumann so clearly enunciated in his homily this evening.

We will also assert that dignity by our efforts to end poverty so that every person can live in accord with his or her dignity. The history of the saints teach us about women and men who worked to better the lives of the indigent. Think about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Saint Frances Cabrini, Mother Drexel, St. John Neumann, and Blessed Solanus Casey—just to name a few from our shores or those who adopted this nation as theirs. However, there are others who responded to the plague, like St. Frances of Rome or St. Aloysius Gonzaga or specific diseases as did St. Damian and St. Marianne Cope. These are concrete witnesses to the dignity of the human person.

We also assert that dignity by eliminating the scourge of racism from our thoughts and discourse. To quote our recent letter against racism: “Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life.”<sup>4</sup>

“We can also draw upon the incredible diversity of the Church worldwide in providing education within the family and make it clear that God dwells in the equal dignity of each person. We ask all the faithful to consider ways in which they and their families can encounter, grow, and witness through an understanding and commitment to these values today.”<sup>5</sup>

We also pray this evening for the conversion of all of those who profit from the killing of unborn children, the continuation of structures that promote poverty, or the failure of offering pregnant women the ability to choose life. May the Lord and our good witness open their hearts to the truth. The Lord Jesus told us that His word is truth!

We remain with the Lord in vigil this night so that we might grow in our knowledge of the Lord and His ways, deepen our love for Him, and be effective disseminators of His divine mercy. We want to be effective instruments of healing, as well. To do that we recognize any hurt that we might have caused to others by our thoughts, words, actions, and inactions. As a community of faith we recognize our need to grow and the grace-filled possibilities that are ours.

Yet our eyes are not closed to the challenges that we face in this world where, as missionary disciples, we are called to be effective evangelizers. We are still marked by the scandal of the innocents abused by members of the clergy and our failure as bishops in the past to be consistent in an effective response.

We have lived through a period of violence and touched with our hands the divisions that separate citizens in their own communities. We watched with horror when even the national Capitol building was breeched by those unwilling to accept the results of a democratic election. The best response to collective error is our personal conversion

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<sup>4</sup> USCCB, “Open Wide Our Hearts”, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

and the evidence of the love among the disciples of Jesus that we are and our love of those who disagree with us. See how we love one another.

This night we beg a loving God to grant us and our country peace and tranquility, and trust in Christ as the answer to the challenges that face us as we spread the Gospel of Life. More than twenty-five years ago, St. John Paul II wrote: “The Church knows that this Gospel of life, which she has received from her Lord,<sup>1</sup> has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person-believer and non-believer alike-because it marvelously fulfils all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.”<sup>6</sup>

Although we struggle to understand how the dignity of human life can be a source of division, we recognize that this fundamental right also divides us politically. Here again we pledge to discuss our differences civilly and with profound respect for those who think differently than we do. “Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us. Pointing fingers and judging others are frequently signs of an inability to accept our own weaknesses, our own frailty. Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser (cf. Rev 12:10).”<sup>7</sup>

The pandemic has also challenged our access to the sacraments and even this major event is reduced, because the uncertainty and the restrictions imposed prohibit large gatherings. Those restrictions will not dampen our commitment to our faith. Even if our ability to receive the sacraments has been curtailed we still unite ourselves with the Lord and pray for His guidance.

We sense very much on this issue of human life that we have a double function. We proclaim the truth about human life without embarrassment or fear. We rejoice that these concerns cross confessional boundaries. People of many faith traditions unite in proclaiming the truth about human life. So many times the hierarchs of the Eastern Orthodox Churches joined in our prayer this night.

We are grateful for all of those who assist pregnant and parenting mothers who face a challenging pregnancy. They tell those in difficult situations not to lose hope, because Christ is with us. I still remember going to the hospital as a young priest to be with a couple concerned about the birth of their third child or baptizing a new born in an incubator.

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<sup>6</sup> St. John Paul II, *Op. cit.*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Patris corde*, 2.

I also remember the tremendous witness of a Roman couple whose fourth child was born with Down's Syndrome. The parents knew of the risk, because the mother was older, but they never thought about not accepting lovingly their child. That young lady still brightens the family home and mirrors the love continually lavished on her.

We have just heard the moving testimony offered by Archbishop Naumann about his mother's selfless commitment to life and raising a family by herself.

When Pope Benedict XVI visited this city in 2008 he reminded us that we are a people of hope and, therefore, must lead different lives. Tonight we wave that banner of hope and we pray for those who are troubled. We pray for a change of heart. We pray that everyone might hear that gentle invitation to come and see and spend time with the Lord Jesus, who alone has the message of everlasting life.

We follow the Good Shepherd who called all of those who are burdened to find rest in Him. We hold out hope and healing to those who feel remorse because they had an abortion or participated in one. The Lord gave the power to forgive sins and His mercy even forgives grave sins against life. St. Faustina repeats the promise of the Lord that the greater the sinner, the wider the access to His mercy. You and I renew our pledge to be beacons of that hope for our sisters and brothers.

Gathered in front of the Blessed Sacrament and gathered in our homes, the domestic Church, we pray tonight that those who have participated in an abortion might be healed. We beg the Lord to touch the hearts of those who support access to this sin and pledge to fund it. May He draw them to the truth and open for them the path to life without end.

Our society will know peace and will manifest harmony when life is respected from the womb to the tomb. From the beginning it all fits together and tonight we pray for that understanding and coherence.

I mentioned that we do our part with witness and with prayer. We also remember the importance of fasting. Some evil can only be overcome through prayer and fasting. While 22 January is a particular day of prayer and fasting in our Country, nothing prevents us from fasting at other times with a prayer for conversion and a deeper respect of human life. We might turn in a special way this year to St. Joseph, the foster father of the child Jesus and the protector of the Virgin. He teaches us to listen to the Lord and gives us an exemplary model for human fatherhood.

"The nobility of Joseph's heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity. Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The Bishop of Rome has offered us the Year of St. Joseph to inspire our actions and to promote the virtues of responsible human fatherhood. No spoken word of his is recorded in the New Testament, but he is always there and always responds to the demands of the situation.

In his Apostolic Letter on St. Joseph, Pope Francis offered a guide to reading the infancy narratives: "..., we may often wonder why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true 'miracle' by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph's creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. Lk 2:6-7). Faced with imminent danger from Herod, who wanted to kill the child, Joseph was warned once again in a dream to protect the child, and rose in the middle of the night to prepare the flight into Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-14)."<sup>9</sup>

A theme which unites us this evening is divine mercy. As we announce the truth about human life we never forget that we are also promoters of the mercy illustrated so dramatically from the Cross when the Lord Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them they know not what they do." (Lk. 23:34). The hand of our divine Father is never too short to forgive every sin, even those that are most grave. All that is necessary is a repentant heart. You and I never miss an opportunity to announce that loving forgiveness held out to every person in his or her need.

We are also gathered in prayer, because we want to be good "parents": those who speak the truth, teach others to act responsibly, and open wide the doors to forgiveness, mercy, and that reestablishment that the prodigal son experienced when he came to his senses and returned home.

We have responded to the Lord's invitation to come and see and dwell with Him. As the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean stated so clearly in their final document at Aparecida: "Knowing Jesus Christ by faith is our joy; following him is a grace, and passing on this treasure to others is a task entrusted to us by the Lord, in calling and choosing us. With eyes enlightened by the light of the risen Jesus Christ,"<sup>10</sup> we cannot fail to shout from the housetops the reality that Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death and invited us to share in His life for all eternity.

You are reminded that this Holy Hour here in Washington, DC is the first of ten back-to-back Holy Hours that will be led by my brother bishops and livestreamed from dioceses across this vast country. We are a nation united in prayer for the respect of human life this night. These different moments of prayer will conclude with the Closing Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life to be celebrated by the Most Reverend William

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<sup>9</sup> Francis, *op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Concluding Document of the V meeting of the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean at Aparecida, 18.

Lori, Archbishop of our first see, Baltimore, here in the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception tomorrow morning at 8 a.m.

The Lord invites us to come, see, and dwell with Him.