

18th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B
August 1-2, 2015

I have heard the grumbling.

Readings: Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15; Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24; John 6: 24-35

Saint Paul's sage advice in today's second reading is worthwhile spiritual food for thought today. He is reminding the early Christians that they should "put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth."

These words are most appropriate today as I reflect on a most difficult and delicate subject. Perhaps you are aware of the undercover videos that have been released by The Center for Medical Progress, a non-profit dedicated to monitoring and reporting on medical ethics issues. They show discussions between actors posing as representatives from a human biologics company and Planned Parenthood.

The videos depicted casual conversation about fetal tissue and organs following abortion procedures. I actually hit the pause button—not wanting to watch— but we cannot shield ourselves from the truth, however uncomfortable it is. Whether the series of videos depicted undercover discussions over a salad and a Chardonnay in a chic restaurant, or in a sterile looking clinic discussing specifics while examining a petri dish, it is reflective of the utter numbing of some people's consciences.

In a 2013 address to a group of Italian doctors, Pope Francis has called abortion the product of a "widespread mentality of profit, the throwaway culture, which has today enslaved the hearts and minds of so many."¹ The actors were so believable that they elicited unfiltered responses, providing a realistic view of what really is going on inside some of these clinics.

¹ Pope Francis, at a gathering of Catholic doctors; 20 September 2013, Rome.

The discussions were so matter of fact, displaying a callous disrespect for human life. Talk about a “throwaway culture!”

USCCB Pro-Life chairman Cardinal Sean O’Malley recently made two key points in the aftermath of these videos:

The first is abortion itself: abortion is a direct attack on human life in its most vulnerable condition. The second is the now standard practice of obtaining fetal organs and tissues through abortion. Both actions fail to respect the humanity and dignity of human life. This fact should be the center of attention in the present public controversy.

But on a beautiful summer weekend, you deserve a message that offers some hope, some spiritual response. Our only response ought to be a decisive and unhesitating “Yes” to life. Our country remains deeply divided on abortion, and sadly we have accepted this reality, assiduously praying and hoping it were otherwise, but not entirely sure what we can do. To those who exposed what people deeply involved in the pro-life movement already knew—this has the potential to change minds and enlighten consciences.

Here is the reality—today’s teenagers and young adults have been fed a lie for the entirety of their lives that it is all about “reproductive rights,” and we all know what that means. Abortion rights advocates have been remarkably shrewd in shielding the reality of abortion by using every conceivable euphemism under the sun, and most media outlets, as a general matter of course, are more than willing to comply.

We must first become educated and then act. And taking the lead from today’s first reading, let us learn the lesson. Say what you

will about their complaining, but he Lord heard the grumbling of the people. Our grumbling needs to be heard, loudly and clearly. Planned Parenthood receives over \$500 million in federal and state aid, representing a significant portion of its annual budget. That is your money and mine.

Yes, there is a place for righteous anger in the spiritual life. Jesus threw out the moneychangers in the temple in a clear act of righteous anger. He dealt with it severely because it was so contrary to the purpose of the Temple as a house of prayer, becoming instead a den of thieves. Severe measures were needed.

But we mustn't remain stuck in righteous anger- that would not be productive. Our anger, our deep sadness and our outrage must develop into something more productive.

We can support pro-life organizations such as the newly formed Abria Pregnancy Resources, soon opening a location right on University Ave. in St. Paul. They provide loving, non-judgmental care to women experiencing crisis pregnancies. These pro-life agencies have helped countless women to “put on their new selves, created in God’s way in righteousness,” just as St. Paul said.

God’s light will always triumph over the darkness of sin and ignorance, and His love must also win out. I am convinced that only prayer and God’s grace will ultimately change hardened hearts, and our response must also be in love.

Let us together seek a better way in our own hearts, in our families, and in our society. Let us commit ourselves to truly building up the Body of Christ in Christian charity and in truth.