

Second Sunday Ordinary Time *The Whole Fruit is already present in the Seed.*

January 20, 2013

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; John 2:1-12

Today is pro-life Sunday, and I feel compelled to discuss what is always a difficult topic— the reality of abortion in our nation, and our response as people of faith. Though I was appropriately sheltered, the reality of abortion could not be hidden from me in 1973. Even then, I knew that something was horribly wrong—by a tragic choice, babies were not being born.

Our pastor at my parish had invited people to stay after Mass, for a presentation detailing the effects of the recent Supreme Court Decision legalizing abortion. I do not recall with specificity the details of the presentation, except that it was a very sad day for me. While I am not certain of the exact date, it must have been within the first year after *Roe v. Wade*, meaning that I was between nine or ten years old. In some key respects, innocence was lost, but sometimes you simply cannot even shield the little ones from the cruel realities of the world. And these realities are hardly new.

All the Church Fathers, Greek and Latin, knew of abortion and spoke of its evil as the taking of innocent life. The Church's teaching on abortion has been clear from the outset. In his *Apologetics*, dated to 197 A.D., Tertullian attacked the horrors of child sacrifice in N. Africa, part of the Roman Empire. He added some thoughts also about abortion, and did not mince words:

Indeed for us murder (*homicidio*) is forbidden once and for all, so it is not permitted even to destroy what is conceived in the womb. To prohibit the birth of a child is only a faster way to murder; it makes little difference whether one destroys a life already born or prevents it from coming to birth. It is a human

being, who is to be a human being, for the whole fruit is already present in the seed (*etiam fructus omnis iam in semine est.*)¹

Before that, using the image of the *two ways*, some of the earliest Church writings (1st century A.D.) warned of following the path to death: “you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.”² Those who procure it and those who perform it are both set on the way of death.³ No one could honestly read Church history and deny the fact that the teaching of the Church from the earliest days regarding abortion has been clear and consistent.

So too in the Church has been the outreach to assist women in difficult circumstances. The clarity on moral doctrine must be backed up with an equal clarity with respect to a willingness to help. I am proud that on this issue the Church truly has “put her money where her mouth is,” reaching out to women who find themselves with seemingly few options.

Building a culture of life must begin early on. For many years now, my own home parish has sponsored a baby shower organized entirely by 5th graders in the school. The items collected benefit clinics that assist women in crisis pregnancies so that they might carry their babies to full term.

It is a powerful pro-life lesson that sticks with the children for a lifetime. And it comes at a perfect time for them in their own development. Let’s be frank. It is difficult to comprehend a number such as 54.5 Million, the estimated number of abortions in this country since 1973.⁴ These numbers are mind-boggling and

¹ Tertullian *Apol.* 9,8

² *Didache*, 2 and *Epistle of Barnabas*, 19:21

³ cf. *Didache*, 15-17, *Epistle of Barnabas* 19:5

⁴ Based on numbers reported by the Guttmacher Institute 1973-2008, with estimates of 1,212,400 for 2009-2011. GI estimates a possible 3% under reporting rate, which is factored into the total.

difficult to comprehend. What is NOT difficult comprehend is the reality of providing direct assistance to women in need so that they carry their babies to term.

Many thousands will descend upon Washington D.C. for the annual pro-Life March. The vast majority of them will be under 25 years of age, another positive sign about the future of the pro-life movement. They are young, zealous and committed— they give me great reason for hope.

In particular, we pastors in the Church need to communicate the reality that young people, especially women, will be and are the most effective voices on the side of pro-life that we have— in many cases, more than ourselves. Too easily people dismiss the moral voices of the clergy on this particular issue. They expect us to say as much. While we must continue to speak out, our most effective strategy will be found in our efforts to encourage our people to be educated and actively supportive of pro-life efforts. This includes those that directly reach out to women in difficult circumstances, providing them the support they need to give birth to their baby.

The most effective witness to life happens in coffee shops, college classrooms, at social gatherings and restaurants. It happens amongst High School students. Nor should we underestimate the powerful influence of the pro-life lapel pin featuring the precious feet. I have had more people ask me about the meaning of the tiny feet than you might imagine— and all over the world, including in a coffee shop in Italy last November. It was the perfect conversation starter, even in a foreign language, and enabled me to witness to the simple biological fact that these are the actual size of the feet of a ten-week old unborn baby.

The whole fruit is already present in the seed. This biological fact is indisputable, as much in the 21st century as it was in the 2nd century. Let us pray for an increase in the fruits of the Holy Spirit, that we may joyfully, lovingly, peacefully and patiently witness to the sanctity of human life, with firm purpose and resolve, no matter the cost.