

It is one thing to take responsibility for something you did, whether it is leaving the lights on at night, forgetting to lock the doors, or leaving dirty dishes in the sink. It is more difficult to take blame for a moral failure, such as lying, cheating or stealing. Modern society has euphemisms for such behavior, as people seek to minimize or even justify their behavior. But if you were innocent? How difficult would it be to take the blame?

Jesus Christ turned the tables by means of his death on the Cross. Not only was he innocent, but he took the blame for something he did not do. He justified us by means of his suffering. Our weaknesses are not hidden from Him, for he has been similarly tempted, though without sin.

St. Irenaeus of Lyon, soon to be named a Doctor of the Church, wrote a treatise entitled “Against the Heresies.” He summarizes the figure of Christ the Savior: “He was buffeted but did not return the blows, 'while suffering he did not threaten,' and while suffering tyrannical violence, he prayed to the Father to forgive those who had crucified him.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus reminded his disciples that they did not know what they were asking for, in desiring to be seated at his right or left. “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant.” It is through suffering that Jesus sits at the right hand. Are you ready to suffer misunderstanding, even suffer the slings of disdain for standing up for life in the womb?

Things may well be coming to a head in our nation’s struggle with the issue of individual state’s rights to regulate abortion. The Texas law is the latest case to work its way through the Courts. This traces itself back to the landmark 1992 U.S. Supreme Court case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, in which states were allowed to impose limited restrictions.

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<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* III, 16,9

More recent federal legislation seeks to eliminate such state provisions. Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to pass the Women’s Health Protection Act. It would “impose abortion on demand nationwide at any stage of pregnancy through federal statute and would eliminate pro-life laws at every level of government– including parental notification for minor girls, informed consent, and health or safety protections specific to abortion facilities.”<sup>2</sup>

Not only is it the most extreme abortion legislation ever on a federal level, it also raises serious constitutional questions. Much of this is lost amidst the daily news which floods us concerning our neighborhoods, our schools, and the lingering effects of the pandemic. Sadly, it just slips past us. It mustn’t. We need to stay informed and active.

This contentious issue is the topic no one wants to discuss, the impolite and inconvenient conversation stopper that so many would prefer to avoid. After all, how many of us set out on any given day to enter into an argument on a contentious issue? I suspect very, very few. And yet, there it is– it lingers, it lurks in the shadows.

In his majority *Roe v. Wade* opinion (22 Jan. 1973), Justice Blackmun acknowledged, “The Constitution does not explicitly mention any right of privacy.”<sup>3</sup> But Justice Blackmun then proceeded to list a line of court decisions that dealt with aspects of privacy, citing the 14<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> amendments, concluding that they were “broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.”

Specifically referenced in the decision were the “penumbras of the Bill of Rights,” from a 1965 Supreme Court case that opened the door for later cases, setting judicial precedent.<sup>4</sup> In that opinion, William O. Douglas

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<sup>2</sup> Statement of Archbishop Joseph Naumann, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities on H. R. 3755

<sup>3</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, majority Opinion, VIII

<sup>4</sup> *Griswold v. Connecticut*, U.S. Supreme Court 381 U.S. 479 (1965) Decided June 7, 1965.

concluded that “specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations from those guarantees that help give them life and substance.” The “right to privacy” was seen as a “non-enumerated” right.

Speaking of shadows, the original and literal meaning of *penumbra* is “a space of partial illumination between the perfect shadow on all sides and the full light.”<sup>5</sup> The term was introduced by astronomer Johannes Kepler in 1604 A.D. to describe the shadows that occur during eclipses. In *Roe v. Wade* (VIII), the Court concluded “that the right of personal privacy includes the abortion decision, but that this right is **not unqualified**, and must be considered against important state interests in regulation.”

Somehow, the Light of Truth must illumine the penumbras of error and the shadows of self-deception. We must seek to move hearts by shining God’s divine ray of light and love upon the darkest corners of our world. We also remain committed to helping women in need, a fundamental component in our pro-life commitment. We priests must tirelessly proclaim God’s mercy to all who have made this tragic choice.

Our beautifully decorated chapel of St. Joseph invites us to ponder the 10 wonders of St. Joseph, Patron and Protector of the Universal Church. One title is “Terror of Demons,” hearkening to 1924 work by a French Curial Cardinal, who noted how missionaries invoked St. Joseph under this title to guard them in their difficult ministry of confronting hostile beliefs and attitudes towards the Catholic faith they were spreading.<sup>6</sup>

We mustn’t be deterred if we too encounter hostility. Continue to engage lovingly in your witness to the sanctity of human life. By your positive witness to life, the light of truth and God’s grace will change hearts and minds in the defense of innocent human life.

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<sup>5</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., 1996

<sup>6</sup> Alexis Henri Marie Cardinal Lepicier, “Go to Joseph, Our Unfailing Protector,” 1924.