



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Father Ralph Wright
October 2009
School Mass

A HOMILY FOR OCTOBER 2009

Well, it's the middle of October 2009, Respect Life Month, so I find myself using a phrase from today's gospel "Crying from the Rooftops." to launch this homily. Crying out once again to alert and warn people of the massive tragedy that envelopes our land: the killing of our unborn children. Some of this teaching is going to be a bit tough for you seventh graders. But note this. Some parishes try to bring home the scope of this tragedy to their parishioners by planting white crosses in a field adjoining the parish church. Well this morning I paced out the ground outside this church. If you go straight across on the West to East path from the church to the High School; if you then turn right and walk towards the Junior School, the grass that stretches from the East West path up to the bank that rises to the Junior School Parking lot could be planted with one cross per square yard. Given the trees and the extra pathway crossing that space diagonally there would be just about enough space for the 4000 crosses that would represent the 4000 children who will be killed in their mothers' womb by abortion today, 16 October 2009. And since January 22 1973, the date of the Roe v Wade decision, the total that has been reached, I am told, is now 50,000,000 .

Vatican II taught in the document on non-Christian religions that through the redeeming of the whole human race by Christ wherever there is goodness, holiness and truth there is the work of the Holy Spirit. This teaching is well illustrated in the case of the so-called Father of Medicine, Hippocrates of Cos, who lived from about 460 BC to 370 BC. His famous Hippocratic Oath articulates the ethics of the physician and some 23 centuries ago spelt out explicitly the pledge that no physician would ever do harm to his patient or give a woman a potion to provoke an abortion. The relevant part of the text reads as follows.

"I shall look upon him who shall have taught me this Art even as one of my parents. I will share my substance with him, and I will supply his necessities, if he be in need. I will regard his offspring even as my own brethren, and I will teach them this Art, if they would learn it, without fee or covenant. I will impart this Art by precept, by lecture and by every mode of teaching, not only to my own sons but to the sons of him who has taught me, and to disciples bound by covenant and oath, according to the Law of Medicine.

The regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patients according to my ability and judgement, and not for their hurt or for any wrong. I will give no deadly drug to any, though it be asked of me, nor will I counsel such, and especially I will not aid a woman to procure abortion. Whatsoever house I enter, there will I go for the benefit of the sick, refraining from all wrongdoing or corruption, and especially from any art of seduction, of male or female, of bond or free. Whatsoever things I see or hear concerning the life of men, in



my attendance on the sick or even apart therefrom, which ought not to be noised abroad, I will keep silence thereon, counting such things to be as sacred secrets.

Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol 15 pp.197 - 198 ©1956

It is a sad thing that , as I mentioned above, 4000 unborn babies will die in our country today because , even with ultrasound, the physicians who abort them see less clearly what they are doing than did the Father of Medicine in 350 BC.

But what about Catholics? Besides the natural ethical moral law that Hippocrates was guided by, Catholics have the added vision provided by a teaching church whose authority goes back via St Peter and the apostles to Christ. What *is* the Catholic teaching about abortion? We know that the explicit condemnation of abortion and infanticide goes back to the Didache or "Teaching of the Apostles" that is believed to have been written while St John the Evangelist was still alive. But what about in our century?

Let me give you two moments of the most authoritative teaching of our century the Second Vatican Council's decree on The Church (De Ecclesia) published in 1965. The pertinent passage describing how Catholics form their consciences according to the teaching of Christ reads as follows:

"In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking."

Lumen Gentium #25

The second comes from the pen of Pope John Paul II. With his eyes on the above text, so that every Catholic reading it would know the full weight of the authority behind it, the pope wrote as follows:

"Faced with the progressive weakening in individual consciences and in society of the sense of the absolute and grave moral illicitness of the direct taking of all innocent human life, especially at its beginning and at its end, the Church's Magisterium has spoken out with increasing frequency in defence of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. The Papal Magisterium, particularly insistent in this



regard, has always been seconded by that of the Bishops, with numerous and comprehensive doctrinal and pastoral documents issued either by Episcopal Conferences or by individual Bishops. The Second Vatican Council also addressed the matter forcefully, in a brief but incisive passage.

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law, and indeed to God himself, the author and guarantor of that law; it contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. "Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action".

As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. This equality is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice, recognizing and protecting every man and woman as a person and not as an object to be used. Before the moral norm which prohibits the direct taking of the life of an innocent human being "there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the poorest of the poor" on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal".¹
Gospel of Life #57

I would like to end with an extract from a letter I read in the November number of *First Things*. Kathryn Scharplazí comment on the centrality of the abortion issue to our faith echoes in penetration and depth some of Flannery O'Connor's most incisive theological insights:

extract from a letter to First Things NOVEMBER 2009

From: Kathryn Scharplaz,

Catholics who think in harmony with the Church correctly perceive that abortion profanes the very core of our faith, which is the incarnation of God as a human being.



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God could have chosen to save fallen man in any way he wanted, but he chose to do it by becoming one of us. And he did not choose to appear suddenly as a fully mature human ó Almighty God chose to become incarnate as a tiny zygote in Maryís womb. God Himself, a human being like us!. Part of what makes the Good News so good is that the inherent dignity of human beings can never again be in doubt.

It is thus far more than just a cultural phenomenon when Catholics place abolition of abortion at the very center of social justice and believe it to be the single most important issue. Human dignity is at stake, as are the reality and the implications of the Incarnation.

To accept abortion is to deny the very nature of man ó and of God. Killing a fellow human being at the same vulnerable, prenatal stage at which Jesusí earthly life began naturally seems more abominable than anything else we can imagine. It is not only a violation of justice and compassion but, at some level, a rejection of Godís ineffable gift of intimacy with himself, which he has given us precisely by means of his life as a fellow human being.

Kathryn Scharplaz, Minneapolis, KANSAS

I close with a recent poem.

ADVENT

my child
I cannot wait
to see you
hidden nine months
in my womb
but felt
kicking
from time to time

I cannot wait
to see your hands and fingers
your tiny toes
to hear
your first cries
and in your face to see
the face of Jesus!