

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 26, 2014
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Matthew 4:12-23

Most of you know that this past week a number of your fellow parishioners joined the March for Life in Washington, D.C., upon the forty-first anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision, which overturned all the laws protecting unborn human life. The March this year was not as large as in years past due to the bitter cold and the snow storm that hit the capital the day before. But it was at the same time an awesome witness to the depth of pro-life sentiment in this country. Despite the uncooperative weather, we still saw hundreds of thousands of marchers, many hailing from considerable distance away.

The March for Life is an example of the principle we see illustrated in today's Gospel. First we see Jesus preach, calling us to repentance from our sins. Then we see him calling disciples, who turn aside from their old way of life to follow Jesus. Then we see Jesus healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. For the spiritual truths that Jesus proclaims, there is a response on the part of the faithful, and then there is a corporeal manifestation of His life in their lives. This pattern of spiritual and corresponding material improvement can be seen through the lives of Christ's disciples down through the ages.

One of the most compelling displays, for example, on the March every year are those women at the end, just before we reach the Supreme Court Building, who hold signs up saying, "I regret my abortion." Invariably, year after year, we see them engaged in conversation, witnessing to the truth of the Gospel of Life, regretful of their participation years before in the culture of death. Here we have women who heard the call of Jesus to repentance, left their former lives behind to follow Him, and now put their conviction into action. Not content only to be loved by God, they stand for hours in the freezing temperatures and biting wind to share the very love they have received.

Spiritual healing we see, then, has physical consequences, physical implications. The women's repentance and healing would have been incomplete if they did not every year send representatives to Washington to share their witness. So it is with us. In order for our witness to the Gospel of Life to be complete, our parish must send several families each year to sacrifice their comfort for the benefit of those being needlessly killed.

The Church's witness, of course, does not end with marching in the freezing cold. Just this weekend a movie came to Cinemark which documents the efforts of a New Jersey woman who seeks to aid women who find themselves homeless and pregnant, or more specifically, find themselves homeless because they are pregnant. Though I have not seen it, the movie *Gimme Shelter* has received positive reviews, but more importantly it shows that crisis pregnancy centers have gone mainstream. Even in a nation where abortion remains legal, there is widespread sympathy for the efforts of Catholics and other men of good will whose faith requires they reach out to help the vulnerable.

The pro-life movement is simply one sphere in which repentance and following Jesus are manifested physically, where spiritual healing can be seen in a corporeal manner. The addict who turns away from his addiction watches his body recover as the abuse of it ends. The glutton who comes to

desire the Bread of Life finds that as the pounds fall away, so do other ailments. The point is that we cannot spiritualize our religion and ignore the reality that repentance has a physical component.

We have fully matured in the faith, however, only if we are like the women I see year after year at the March for Life holding signs that indicate their regret. That is, we cannot be satisfied with our own healing, but like Jesus, we must offer the healing balm we have received to those who are still in darkness. Those women in Washington aren't there bragging about their transformation: they are part of a campaign called "Silent no more," which seeks to raise awareness about the devastating effects of the culture of death. But even better, they seek to show women who have also been victims where they can find healing, where they can turn to be certain they won't be used or exploited again and then in turn can offer their witness to yet more vulnerable and abused women.

The evangelical nature of Christianity and the Catholic Church's emphasis upon manifesting our faith through good works that benefit others make it no surprise that the tide is turning on the issue of legalized abortion. More Americans today describe themselves as pro-life than ever before since this survey began to be taken, and the only legislative victory from last year that the agents of the culture of death can boast about is a measure in California to let Physicians' Assistants perform abortions. Even here we see a silver lining: the reason such legislation was conceived is that there are so few physicians willing to perform abortions.

Elsewhere the prospects look good indeed. Legislature after state legislature has passed measures restricting abortion, and health regulations are shutting down clinics—so many that there are now less than six hundred in the whole country, a thousand fewer than twenty years ago.

Who has spearheaded all this progress? The Catholic Church. In fact, when *Roe v. Wade* happened forty-one years ago, the only Church to vociferously denounce the decision was the Catholic Church, and our resistance has been bearing fruit ever since. Even *Time* magazine admits the forces of death are losing; they lament the losses, to be sure, but they can't deny reality.

The battle isn't over, certainly it is not won, but the fruits we witness in this arena can inspire us to works in other facets of our lives. How are your repentance and decision to follow Jesus manifested? How has repentance led you to reach out in a physical way to others in need? How we answer these questions is important because they are the very questions our Lord will pose to us when we finally meet Him face to face.