

Baltimore Archdiocese warms up for March for Life, honors joyful advocates

Blessing participants as they prepared for the Jan. 27 March for Life in Washington, D.C., Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori minced no words in describing what the pro-life movement is up against.

"I think we could say we are living in a gloomy and divided society, and that many people throughout the world live in the shadows where the gift of life has been degraded by poverty, injustice, even tyranny," the archbishop said in his homily at a special pro-life Mass Jan. 22 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

The archbishop went on to describe the "culture of death," a phrase coined by St. John Paul II, and how it has expanded beyond "decades" of denying "the humanity of the unborn child in the womb" to the campaign for physician-assisted suicide, underway in Maryland among other states, that would "deny the human worth of the frail elderly and chronically ill ... "



On behalf of the Little Sisters of the Poor, Mother Joseph Caroline Beutler receives the

Life is Beautiful Award from Archbishop William E. Lori Jan. 22. (Kevin J. Parks/CR Staff)

"Thanks be to God, death and gloom do not have the last words," Archbishop Lori continued, exhorting the faithful to draw close to Jesus.

"He is the author, the source of our life, and in taking on our human nature, Jesus has shown us how precious we are in the sight of his heavenly Father."

The archbishop was accompanied by concelebrants Bishop Denis J. Madden, retired auxiliary bishop of Baltimore; Monsignor James P. Farmer, pastor of St. Thomas More in Baltimore; and Trinitarian Father Stanley DeBoe, chaplain for the Little Sisters of the Poor at St. Martin's Home for the Aged in Catonsville.

The Little Sisters received the archdiocesan Life is Beautiful Award, presented to those, according to the Mass program, who exemplify the call of St. John Paul II's encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" to proclaim "a genuine celebration of the Gospel of life."

At the conclusion of Mass, the sisters received a standing ovation as Archbishop Lori

presented them with the award.

Reflecting on the beauty of life at a post-Mass celebration, "Life is Beautiful," at Archbishop Borders Hall in the Catholic Center, Sister Lawrence Mary Pocock of the Little Sisters of the Poor turned to a familiar source - the 1946 Christmas classic, "It's a Wonderful Life," in which a despondent man is shown the diminished state of the world that would have been without his existence.

"In reflection on this movie, I cannot help but wonder what this life would be like if the Christ child had not been born," Sister Lawrence Mary said. "Could we say that, yes, life is beautiful?"

She also pondered the impact of St. Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, who have served countless elderly poor in the final stages of their lives.

The elderly occupy a special place in the hearts, likewise, of the Nellies family, parishioners of Sacred Heart in Glyndon, who, for their outreach at Future Care Cherrywood, a nursing home and rehabilitation center in Reisterstown, received the archdiocesan Culture of Life Medal of Honor.

"We think we're sharing Christ's love for them, but they give it back to us," said Denise Blair-Nellies, the mother, of the family's ministry to the elderly.

She recounted a story of how her youngest daughter, Catherine, 5, came to her with a hand-drawn picture.

"Mommy," she said, "I made this for the woman who loves me."

The woman would later identify herself from the little girl's description: "That's me." Bill Nellies, the father, noted that one Future Care resident, now in her 90s, gets a special joy from the visits, as she used to do the same thing as a girl.

Denise Blair-Nellies said that prayer is a key part of their ministry; the family coordinates a holy hour of Eucharistic adoration for the cause of life every first Friday, inviting children and parishioners to participate with personal prayers and songs of praise.

The family of eight prays a decade of the rosary every morning and night, and is especially devoted to the Visitation, in which the Blessed Virgin Mary's visit to her cousin, Elizabeth, is also a meeting between the children in their respective wombs, Jesus and John the Baptist, the latter jumping for joy.



Two-year-old James Coughlin is mesmerized by guitarist Tony Melendez, as the armless musician plays with his feet during a luncheon following the Life is Beautiful Mass in Baltimore Jan. 22. (Kevin J. Parks/CR Staff)

Tony Melendez, 54, a Missouri-based guitarist and vocalist born without arms, provided music both at the Mass and reception.

"Anytime we're close to the March for Life, I'm usually in the area, and I feel honored to take part," said Melendez, who plays the guitar - picking, strumming,

plucking and working the fretboard - entirely with his feet.

His performance, which would be virtuoso for a player with two arms and 10 fingers, earned him a kiss from St. John Paul II in 1987.

Archbishop Lori, who will march himself Jan. 27, encouraged all to stand up for life with the same joy displayed by the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Nellies and Melendez.

"You are sent neither as angry protestors nor as brokers of power and influence," he said. "Rather, you are to go as peaceful, joyful and committed proponents and advocates for the beauty and goodness of God's gift of life at every stage of human existence."

For a video of Tony Melendez' performance, [click here](#).

Also see:

Armless guitarist strums message of hope