

Homily: Pro-Life Mass

Cardinal McCarrick, thank you for your welcome to this great Church, my brother bishops, thank you for coming again in such great numbers here.

My sisters and brothers, pilgrims all in the cause of life, thank you for filling once again this great shrine. It is a place of prayer and hope. You come, all of you, laity, sisters, priests and bishops, with enthusiasm for a cause that, each year, sees us closer to the goal of asserting in law and in fact that life is God's gift.

As chair of the pro-life activities committee of our national bishops' conference, I have seen the extraordinary work of so many across our nation who devote themselves so tirelessly to the great cause of life, and to the prospect of an end to the saddening curse of legalized abortion. Please let me begin with deepest thanks to those many who do so much to advance our Church's pro-life purpose: to you gathered here, to those who follow us on television and to those millions of Catholics and others around the country whose work and prayers contribute so much to the dynamic impetus toward an end to legalized abortion; to all the many young people dedicated to the pro-life movement, you are so impressively represented in this congregation and you give such high hope to the movement; and to those who direct our diocesan pro-life offices, many of whom met here in Washington today and will be marching with their people tomorrow; to those in and with our state Catholic conferences, you carry the bright banner of life into the public square and help us organize for decisive political action; and to the very committed members and the able and gifted staff of our national conference's pro-life activities committee. Your dedication and faithfulness across the years have been and continue to be a living testament to a spirit imbued with the Gospel of Life.

We gather in this sacred space to bear witness yet again to the terrible cloud that has darkened our nation since the Supreme Court declared 33 years ago today that the life of a human being, a life created in God's image, may be ended before its birth. We come together to pray that this darkest of clouds might at last be lifted. We come together again to pray for the triumph of life.

We gather in the awful knowledge that since that twenty-second day of January

1973, the lives of no less than 46 million of God's children have been summarily denied participation in the human community and that, each year, they are joined by over a million, three-hundred thousand more. Consider the horrible magnitude of this slaughter of innocents:

There have been more U.S. abortions in the last 33 years than there are people living today in both New York City and Los Angeles!

In the last 12 months alone, nearly as many children were aborted as there are residents of the City of Philadelphia.

In the last 12 months alone, nearly a half-million more unborn babies were aborted than there are people living in the city of Detroit.

In just the last 12 months, nearly twice as many babies were aborted in our country as there are residents of San Francisco.

The unholy magnitude of it all is staggering! And so we come together to remember prayerfully their mothers, their fathers, their siblings and their grandparents; and we pray for those who face the temptation of abortion. We come together again to pray for the triumph of life.

As related in our first reading, Jonah's story teaches us how God worked in the Judaism of an earlier age, and how God works now. An unwilling Jonah is sent by God to announce divine retribution to the city of Nineveh. At first, he refuses God, for Jonah was an Israelite and Nineveh was Israel's great enemy. Ultimately, though, he relents and preaches repentance for evil. He is more than a little surprised when the king and the people repent, and divine punishment is averted. The story teaches that the call to repentance is universal, not