

# Maryland March for Life 2009

We gather again, here in our State capital and in the midst of Maryland's legislative session, to promote the cause of life. As happens annually, our Mass is a Lenten Mass and we are providentially offered the Lenten readings of the day to shed light on our efforts.

To begin with, let's take the penitential prayer of the book of Daniel to heart: "We have sinned and done evil, we have departed from your commandments and your laws." For aren't we too ready at times to critique others' shortcomings before confronting our own failures in respecting the dignity of life. This is not to suggest that the crime of abortion be simply one of many evils, on the same level as our neglect of the poor, our lack of concern about the violence in our streets, our hostility toward the immigrant and our vindictiveness toward criminals convicted of capital offenses. But the selectivity and inconsistency on such life issues on the part of some of us, weakens our credibility when we cry out in defense of life in the womb and in our opposition to euthanasia.

While in the U.S. last April, Pope Benedict XVI, called us to a renewal of a "formation of the heart," "an encounter with God in Christ which awakens (our) love and opens (our) spirit to others." This calls for humility, an admission that while we have some things right, we might not have it all together.

The recent debate in our legislature over capital punishment offered some interesting contrasts. On the one hand we had elected officials strongly advocating for the repeal of capital punishment on religious grounds who, when it comes to abortion refuse to oppose abortion because that would be to impose one's religious beliefs on others.

On the other hand, we have those happily on our side on the abortion issue. They acknowledge an obvious pro-life conflict in favoring capital punishment, but they vote for capital punishment nonetheless, because it would threaten their re-election not to do so.

Polls tell us that the tide is changing regarding capital punishment though it is still, and promises to be, a highly charged emotional issue. For the sake of consistency in our pro-life message and in a renewal of the formation of the heart called for by Pope Benedict, I would call on all pro-lifers to share the conversion experience that was mine as I listened to Pope John Paul II in St. Louis in 1999: "The dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform."

At our Cathedral in Baltimore last October on Pro-Life Sunday, I shared my regret that, to some of our citizens, the pro-life movement comes across as angry, reproachful, or excessively judgmental. These critics of our stand who deny the absolute evil of abortion might point to the words of Jesus just heard in our Gospel, "Stop judging and you will not be judged," as if Jesus was an early day relativist, of the kind that Pope Benedict spoke in addressing American youth last April. He said the call for freedom without reference to the truth of the human person is a call to value everything indiscriminately. The relativist sees it wrong and foolhardy to seek the truth; it's controversial, it is said, divisive and best kept private.

No, let us not judge other's motives, let God read consciences. But by all means, hold fast and without exception the cause for which Christ suffered and died, the love of God for very human life from its very beginnings.

In the earliest book dedicated to Christian morality, written even while some of the later New Testament books were being formed, the Didache, or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, speaks of the two ways - of life and of death- and admonishes, "Thou shalt not procure an abortion, nor commit infanticide." This solemn teaching has never been in doubt from the earliest days of our faith.

And how, much further scandalized would those 12 Apostles be to think that a follower of Christ would propose to create life in order to destroy it to benefit another.

To you activists in the pro-life cause, my heartfelt thanks for your boundless energy in bringing to life and keeping alive the creed that forms the core, the heart and soul of America's identity - that all of us are created equal and endowed by our creator

with the inalienable right to life. My late friend, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, must surely have had you in mind when he wrote:

*“Whatever else it is, the pro-life movement of the last 30-plus years is one of the most massive and sustained expressions of citizen participation in the history of the United States.”*

And, unfortunately, the battle is far from won. Gradually and determinedly a new administration has taken significant steps leading our nation away from a culture of life and instead toward a culture of death. In his first weeks in office, President Obama has lifted restrictions on federal funding for overseas abortions and for human embryonic stem cell research in the United States. His actions follow a campaign promise to sign into law the once-defeated and yet-to-be-reintroduced Freedom of Choice Act, prompting this dire warning from the president of our Bishops Conference, Cardinal Francis George. As radical a pro-abortion declaration as we have ever seen, Cardinal George claimed that deceptively-labeled Act and other “Aggressively pro-abortion policies, legislation and executive orders will permanently alienate tens of millions of Americans and would be seen by many as an attack on the free exercise of their religion.”

So we have much to march for this evening and pray about in this Eucharist – with Daniel, to pray forgiveness for the evil we condone or have condoned, and with confidence that the Bread of Life will reform all hearts to see his image in every brother and sister, born and reborn.