

Pro-Life Homily

To Cardinal Hickey, thanks to you for your gracious welcome to this great basilica which reflects so well your love of it and your love for the Church.

To you Cardinal George, thank you for the leadership you give us all in the cause of life, and for being here with us this evening.

And also I thank you Archbishop Montalvo, and you, my brother bishops from across this country, for participating in this Mass this evening. Missing from our number is someone who would very much like to be with us, Cardinal John O'Connor of New York. I called him to tell him that we would be missing him and asked if he had a message for us. He told me that this is the first time ever that he has missed participating in this Mass and in the March for Life. He is much distressed at not being able to be with us, and he will offer up his missing the event as a prayer for God's blessing on what happens here and tomorrow in the March for Life. He is delighted that he is represented here in a special way by the Sisters of Life from New York. In your name, I told Cardinal O'Connor how much we love him, how we shall miss him now and how we shall pray for him in this, the great prayer of Jesus, the Holy Eucharist.

And to all of you, thanks and thanks again, for your presence. Thank you for coming to proclaim the Gospel of Life. Thank you for coming to participate in the Holy Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ feeds us with his living self and gives us strength and fullness of life. Thank you for your advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable members of the human family. From my heart and in the name of all my brother bishops, I give you thanks for giving witness to the Gospel of Life in all you do — in your families and parishes, in your neighborhoods, and in communities all across our America. By promoting the Gospel of Life with conviction and compassion, yes, and with great perseverance, you strengthen the foundation of our American house of freedom.

The cause we serve continues to be the great civil rights issue of our time. In defending the right to life of every person from conception until natural death, we defend the first of those rights upon which the founders of our country built our

national claim of independence. In proclaiming the culture of life in which every child is welcomed in life and protected in law, we challenge our nation to renew the great promise of its founding. In defending those whom society may be tempted to deem “useless” or “disposable,” we broaden the circle of inclusion in our country. In serving the cause of the Gospel of Life, we work to give America a new birth of freedom: Freedom grounded in truth; freedom fulfilled in goodness . . . the freedom to live . . . the right to live!

Thank you also for taking up this task with such generosity and enthusiasm, in and out of season, and for the duration.

Tonight in this basilica, in the Great Jubilee of this year of grace 2000, we gather as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our scriptures remind us what it means to live the Gospel of Life as servants of the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. It means conversion, one of the preeminent themes of the Jubilee Year. Our Lord began his public ministry by saying “be converted and believe in the Gospel.” Our first reading tonight tells the story of Jonah, and his ministry of calling people to conversion.

To be “converted” means to undergo a profound change of both mind and heart. [Conversion is upward-focused; it is perfection-seeking.] Conversion is always conversion to the truth. And the truth we celebrate this Jubilee Year — the truth of salvation — tells us this: That we live our lives within the embrace of our loving God, mindful that, as Jesus taught, “Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. As for you, every hair of your head has been counted; so do not be afraid of anything, you are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows.” (Matthe