

Right to Life Vigil Mass

Twenty-five years ago this past October, a man unknown to most of the world stepped onto the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He was introduced as Pope John Paul II. He said he came to us "from a far country." Soon afterwards, at the Eucharist inaugurating his papal ministry, he called us to a new attitude of fearlessness in the Lord with his words. "Be not afraid," he said. "Be not afraid!"

Tonight, as we prepare to mark the 31st anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, he calls to us again, this time out of his own physical suffering. "Be not afraid," he tells us. "Be not afraid!" The basis for his fearlessness now is as it was a quarter of a century ago. It is this: That those who give their lives to Christ can live beyond fear, because Christ took all the world's fear upon himself, on the cross. And in offering all the world's fear to God in a perfect act of obedience, Christ made it possible for all of us to live with fear—and to live beyond fear.

Christian courage, rooted in Christian faith, creates a universal homeland where no one is "from a far country." This is why, for the last quarter of a century, we have embraced Pope John Paul II as our guide, our inspiration, and our friend. This is why we embrace the stranger, no matter his country, whether born or unborn. This is why we so strongly feel the vital bond that binds us tonight, old friends and new . . . a bond that ties us together in citizenship, . . . a bond that can ennoble citizenship if we live out the courage of our Christian faith.

And so, dear sisters and brothers in the great cause of the sanctity of human life, "Be not afraid!"

The readings for today's Mass strike special chords of memory and reflection here tonight.

How many times, over these past three decades, have we imagined ourselves Davids, confronted by a legion of Goliaths:

- We face a culture that too often measures life not by its sanctity, but by its utility.
- We see courts that usurp powers entrusted by the Constitution to the people

and their elected representatives.

- We are fed by a media that fail to report what all reputable survey research makes clear — that the overwhelming majority of Americans reject the resort to abortion in the overwhelming majority of the cases in which abortions are performed.
- We are troubled by politicians who defy the natural moral law and the settled moral teaching of their religious communities.
- We sense the apathy of those among us who cannot see that *Roe v. Wade* is the *Dred Scott* decision of our time.
- We find defeatism among those, once in our ranks, who can see no way forward.

But then we read of the “five smooth stones” (1 Samuel 17:40) that the shepherd boy took into battle against the giant Philistine, . . . of how conviction and courage and compassion and clarity and constancy won the day more than two-and-a-half millennia ago. And we remind ourselves of other causes that seemed hopeless in their time — the cause of disenfranchised African-Americans in the mid-twentieth century, the cause of disenfranchised Polish workers in the 1970s. And we take heart, knowing that the power of God still works through those who speak truth to power with conviction and courage and compassion and clarity and constancy.

In a similar way, we can take heart from tonight’s Gospel. The Lord who could heal a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath can heal what is withered in our own lives, every day of our lives. When we are tired, he can restore our withered energy and strength. When we are disheartened, he can lift our withered spirit. When we know fear, he can restore our withered courage. The Lord invites us to come to him tonight to be healed. For, in his kingdom, every day is a day of Sabbath healing, a day to live within the redeeming and sanctifying power of God’s love. Yes, the Lord can heal us, . . . and throug