

Taking the Leap of Faith

“It’s a leap of faith.” It’s an oft-used expression in our vernacular used to describe those actions of ours that defy logic, come with no guarantee or proof and which promise the greatest reward for our risk. It requires us to “put ourselves out there” head-first—totally and completely.

Perhaps the greatest leap we Catholics will make in our lives is the one many of us don’t even remember. For it was our Baptism where we meet and are embraced by God for the first time and are given the symbolic “tools” (candle, water, oil and even guides, in our sponsors) for our lifelong journey of seeking to recognize God in our human sisters and brothers.

The identity of Christ is made known to us no more clearly than in the solemn and powerful liturgies of Holy Week. On Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Christ’s humanity is revealed as we witness the weight of His suffering, followed by the joyful revelation of God’s power and gift to us through Jesus’ glorious resurrection at Easter.

For the more than one thousand local Catholics who will enter our local Church this coming Saturday at the Easter Vigil Mass—the largest number in at least a decade—the exhilaration and glow of our newly-Baptized sisters and brothers seeing Christ as if for the first time, will, please God, inspire us to clear the distractions that have too often prevented us from exercising the responsibilities of our own Baptismal call. Such distractions, for many of our Catholic brethren in this country, have been readily apparent in issues of recent public debate; this is particularly true of discussions about capital punishment and immigration reform. Too often we have placed civil law above God’s law and in doing so, have forsaken appreciation for the dignity of every human life. We must ask ourselves this Holy Week why this is.

In 1995, Pope John Paul II published an encyclical letter he titled *Evangelium Vitae*, the “Gospel of Life.” In it, he called upon Roman Catholics, other people of faith, and all people of good will to respect life, God’s great gift, and to defend it at all stages, from conception until natural death. Woven into the fabric of that exhortation was an appeal to end capital punishment—to stand against the killing of even those who

have committed the most heinous of crimes and, in doing so, have affronted God's dominion and denied their own and their victims' God-given humanity. If other bloodless means of punishment are available to protect society from murderous violence, the Pope said, then these should be employed as being more in keeping with the common good.

Yet many Catholics refuse to embrace this teaching of the Church, instead yielding to the emotion-driven responses that serve as blinders that prevent them from seeing Christ in the faces of the perpetrators as well as the victims. Similarly, the issue of immigration stirs emotions and invokes cultural passions that blind us.

In our 2007 statement, "Where all find a Home: A Catholic Response to Immigration," Maryland's Catholic bishops wrote, "As Catholics, we must move past divisions and remain focused on the dignity of the human person and the welfare of families."

Just as we clearly acknowledged and supported that the rule of law must be respected, we urged that the basis of our national discussion of this important issue be the recognition that undocumented immigrants are persons with dignity. "Our American ideals call us to participate in the public debate; our Catholic faith urges us to do so with charity....Catholics should welcome discussion of immigration and the challenges it can present. We must also recognize distinctions in this debate: The legality of a person's entry into the United States is one issue: our response to him now that he's here is a separate one. The former is the government's responsibility; the latter is ours."

My prayer for the people of God of this Archdiocese this Holy Week, is that each of us will clear the distractions caused by cultural influences and emotional tangents to see Christ anew and, in the light of Easter, we might recognize Him in the distressing disguises of those, in effect, dehumanized by those forgetful of the Gospel.

This is God's law. This is our Baptismal call. This is our leap of faith.