

**Homily for the Mass with Diocesan Pilgrims to the March for Life
January 23, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear pilgrims for life, brothers and sisters in Christ, I am happy to celebrate the Holy Mass with and for you this evening as you prepare to set out for Washington, D.C. Your willingness to endure two long bus rides, massive crowds, cold weather, and several inches of snow in a city that is not used to it is a testimony both to your love of life and also of the Lord.

We gather this evening in joy, aware of the Lord's presence among us, especially in the Eucharist but also in one another. But we also gather in sadness as our hearts and minds turn to the 40th anniversary of the tragic Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade.

As you know, this infamous decision legalized the killing of unborn children through the heinous practice known as abortion. Since that dreadful day on January 22, 1973, more than 55 million babies have been killed in this nation founded on the very principle that every person is given by his Creator the inalienable right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

To put that number in some perspective, some 1.5 million Americans have been killed in every war in which this country has fought since 1775. Put another way, the number of children killed by abortion each year in this country is greater than the present populations of the States of Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Tennessee combined. To put it even more starkly, in the same span of time in which more than 55,000,000 children were aborted in our land, just 133,115,440 were born. The number is staggering, and terribly sad.

This is why my brother Bishops and I have called the faithful to lift up their voices in humble supplication to the Father of Mercies in a novena on the occasion of this most deplorable anniversary. Let every member of the baptized, all who claim the name of Christian and every person of good will, seek to atone for the evil of abortion and to pray for the conversion of hearts and minds. I urge everyone entrusted to my pastoral care to pray and fast and go on pilgrimage, praying that this Culture of Death will give way to the Culture of Life.

I am deeply grateful to each of you for your invaluable witness to the beauty and dignity of every human life. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for taking up the call of your Bishops to go on pilgrimage to the

nation's capital to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Together with at least six other busses and a few vans that will also leave from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, you will march peacefully and bear witness to the love Jesus Christ bears for every person. Above all, as pilgrims of peace, you will proclaim by your witness that "justice will march before [the Lord], and make a way for his footsteps" (Psalm 85:14).

I wish that I could join you on this March for Life as you remind every citizen of this great land that "near indeed is his salvation for those who fear [the Lord]" (Psalm 85:10). Dear young people, your enthusiasm and your joy are apparent to all; this is, I am sure, no small part of why so many adults are gladly going with you again his year. As your Shepherd and Father in the faith, I encourage you to unite your enthusiasm and your joy with your faith and proclaim the truth of God's love for everyone!

Everyone who speaks out against the horror of abortion and seeks to give aid to women in crisis pregnancies is living out this Year of Faith. When he opened this great year with his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Door of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that "faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes."¹ Because we believe in the dignity of every human life from the moment

conception to the moment of natural death, we must speak out and call for a greater respect for life in society in general and in our nation's laws in particular. We cannot simply sit idly by as if a great slaughter of innocents were not occurring.

Whenever the Church teaches about the dignity of all human life, she does not teach merely her opinion but the truth she has received from Jesus Christ. Because it comes from the Lord, it cannot simply be laid aside. To have faith in Jesus Christ means "choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him."²

You, dear pilgrims, have chosen to stand with the Lord and to walk with him. As you leave tonight, you do not make your way as tourists who simply want to take in the sights. To be sure, you will have some tourist activities, but this is not the principal motivation behind your journey. You leave as witnesses, as those who go in search of God and who seek to make him known to others. You leave home so as to return changed by an encounter with grace. Do not forget this!

Every pilgrimage necessarily involves a sharing in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, I encourage to keep the words of the Apostle Paul ever before you: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and

beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another” (Colossians 3:12-13).

It is safe to say that during the course of your pilgrimage, you will grow frustrated with yourselves and with each other; you will encounter those who oppose the message of peace you bring; and you will encounter obstacles of one kind or another. Do not let these take away your joy, and do not allow them to lessen your love! In all that you do, “let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body,” the peace into which you walk to invite those you meet along your way (Colossians 3:15).

If you seek to offer the sufferings you encounter during the course of your pilgrimage for life in union with the sufferings of Christ, many graces will be given to you and to others. Ask the Lord to take your difficulties and frustrations and use them to bring others to conversion. If you march in this way, you, too, will grow in greater union with Jesus Christ; you will return home not as you left, but marked by a greater holiness and a deeper love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9.