

**March for Life Diocesan Pilgrim Mass  
January 22, 2014**

**St. Peter's Church  
Washington, DC**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is with mixed feelings that we gather together for this Mass in our nation's capital on the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*, in which abortion was made legal in our country. On the one hand, it is with great sorrow that we gather as we recall the fact that more than 55 million children in this country have been deprived the gift of life that we all have the privilege of enjoying. Added to this is the discouragement we may feel in the face of court decisions, policies and legislation in our government which continue to be opposed to the sanctity of life at every stage.

On the other hand, as people of faith, we are never without hope because we walk with the Lord, and with Him, life is victorious. It is that hope, firmly rooted in the Lord, which motivates us to continue to press forward in standing up for the rights of the unborn. It is very appropriate

that our first reading today is the well-known story of David and Goliath as it offers some parallels to the battle for life in which we engage.

The first element of comparison is the perceived mismatch between foes. Goliath, the Philistine, is described as a “champion” who is “six cubits and a span tall” (1 Samuel 17:4) which is approximately nine feet and nine inches in height. In addition, he is decked out with armor and weapons which must have appeared as a truly imposing sight. David, who stepped up to challenge the giant, is much smaller and, after putting on a helmet and armor, decided to cast them off and only approach Goliath with a staff and some stones.

Based purely on the visible data, it would seem as though David was severely outmatched in this battle. Similarly, there is a temptation to be discouraged with what seems to be a lack of progress in the pro-life area. We can tend to feel outmatched when confronted with legislators and courts which continue to abuse the power entrusted to them by promoting laws opposed to life. Some may question whether we will ever be successful in overturning such legislation and court decisions after so many failed attempts.

Like David, though, we are called to renew our trust in the Lord who takes what little we may bring to the table and multiplies it with His powerful aid. There are many signs for hope in our struggle that suggest that the momentum is shifting such that those who defend life are not as outmatched as it might seem. In recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of abortions has decreased nearly 10% between the years of 2001 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, recent Gallup polls report that a majority of Americans now consider themselves to be pro-life.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in 2013, a record-number 87 surgical abortion clinics closed their doors to business in the United States, resulting in a 12% net decrease from last year and a 73% decrease from 1991.<sup>3</sup>

Back home in Illinois, the long-delayed Parental Notice of Abortion Act finally went into effect last summer, thanks to the Illinois Supreme Court's unanimous ruling that the law does not violate the Illinois Constitution. Under the Illinois law, passed in 1995 but not put into effect for almost two decades because of obstructive lawsuits filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, a parent or guardian must be notified at least 48 hours before a child under the age of 18 undergoes an abortion. This is a huge victory for the rights of parents.<sup>4</sup>

These are all signs that should be a source of great encouragement to us in this fight for life. The giant of the abortion industry is not as indestructible as it may seem. With the Lord at our side to assist us, great progress is being made and there is every reason to believe that we will continue to see positive strides in working to change laws and, more importantly, to change hearts.

A second element of comparison from the story of David and Goliath with the pro-life movement is youth. When David volunteers to go and fight against the Philistine, Saul tells him: "You cannot go up against this Philistine and fight with him, for you are only a youth, while he has been a warrior from his youth" (1 Samuel 17:33). David did not let his youth hold him back from taking action for he was confident that the Lord was with Him and that He would deliver him from his enemy.

One of the most visible characteristics of the pro-life movement in the United States is that it involves so many young people. Like David, you do not see your youth as a limiting factor in this fight. It is, rather, a very valuable asset, one which brings with it energy and passion. I am reminded of the words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, at the Prayer Vigil on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day this past

summer. He commented on news reports of “many young people who throughout the world have taken to the streets in order to express their desire for a more just and fraternal society.” In response to this, he told the young people: “It is the young who want to be the protagonists of change. Please, don’t leave it to others to be the protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future!”<sup>5</sup>

In the pro-life movement in the United States, it is evident that the young people have taken up this challenge to be those protagonists of change. Your presence among thousands of other young people here today should be encouraging to you. It is certainly inspiring for me to see and I am most grateful for your enthusiasm and dedication to this cause. We can all come away from this march with renewed confidence in the hope that we have of victory, a victory which will result in every child having the opportunity to be welcomed into the world with love. Until that day comes, we cannot be content to sit idly by, hoping that somebody else will do the work.

Your presence here shows willingness on your part to make the sacrifices necessary to take a stand for what you believe. May that attitude be carried with you as you march today and as you return home to work

for the building up of a culture that welcomes and respects all human life from conception to natural death.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist at this Mass, we ask the Lord for the nourishment that we need to persevere in this battle. May our reception of our Lord motivate us today and every day to be His faithful disciples, boldly proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed, confident, like David, that we will be victorious, for we march with the Lord, and with Him, no enemy can defeat us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC, *Abortion Surveillance – United States 2010*, 29 November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup, Abortion, [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).

<sup>3</sup> Operation Rescue, “Death Throes of the Death Industry: A Record 87 Surgical Abortion Clinics Close in 2013”, [www.operationrescue.org](http://www.operationrescue.org), 23 December 2013.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/07/11/illinois-upholds-parental-notification-on-abortion-after-18-year-legal-battle/>

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily at Prayer Vigil with Young People*, 27 July 2013.