

**Homily for the 43rd Annual Day of Prayer for Life
Saint Francis of Assisi Parish
Teutopolis, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we come to the altar of the Lord to give thanks for the gift of human life and to pray for the grace in our lives to be true disciples of our Lord, so that we might continue to spread the news of the Gospel of Life to all people.

In our liturgy today, we remember in a special way Mrs. Jack (Loretta) Koester, who died last February at the age of 91. Loretta was a member of St. Francis of Assisi Parish here in Teutopolis for over 60 years. She was a member of the Council of Catholic Women, having held the office of Secretary of the Diocesan CCW for 6 years. She was appointed to the Bishop's Pro-Life Congressional District Action Committee by Bishop Joseph McNicholas, thus the beginning of the monthly deanery prayer vigils that continue to this day. She was a founding member of Effingham County Right to Life. She was also a founding member of the Family Life

Pregnancy Care Center in Effingham. In 2002, she was bestowed with the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Award by His Holiness Pope John Paul II for distinguished service to the Church and the world, along with the *Magnificat* Award from my predecessor, Bishop George Lucas. May this great pro-life legacy of Mrs. Koester inspire others to step up to the challenge of confronting the ongoing threats to human life from conception to natural death. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.

Tomorrow I will have the opportunity to lead a prayer rally at the State Capitol Building in Springfield in observance of the “Fortnight for Freedom,” which began last week. This two-week period, which is called a fortnight, is a time when our liturgical calendar celebrates a series of great martyrs who remained faithful in the face of persecution by political power, including Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher, Saint John the Baptist, Saints Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome. The purpose of this effort is to issue a nationwide call to defend religious liberty and to urge efforts to protect the first freedom of the Bill of Rights.

The theme of this year’s Fortnight is “Freedom for Mission.” In past years, people have participated in the Fortnight in diverse ways, including

interfaith prayer services, special Masses and holy hours, and public events where speakers have highlighted the various threats to religious liberty, both at home and abroad. This year, we encourage Christians to use these two weeks to reflect on the importance of religious freedom so that the Church might have space to carry out her mission of service and mercy.

While we are gathered here to conclude the day of prayer for life, it is fitting that we connect our prayers to those participating in the Fortnight for Freedom and to pray for the grace to keep fighting to protect our ability to carry out the whole mission of the Church. The central focus of this mission is on saving souls and converting hearts through our proclaiming the truth of the Gospel of Life. To do this effectively, we must be thoroughly instilled with a zeal for the mission of the Church as well as the Culture of Life in our thoughts, words, and actions. Moreover, our thoughts, words and actions must be consistent with what we believe as disciples of Christ.

Just as we strive to follow the truth of the Gospel and live as true Christian disciples, so too must we strive to live and proclaim the Gospel of Life in our daily lives. It is not only inconsistent but also morally impossible to be “personally opposed” to abortion while claiming not to

wish to “impose” one’s views upon the law. The only important question for anyone who takes the position of “I am personally opposed, but don’t want to impose my beliefs” is whether he or she supports laws which expose some people – namely, babies in the womb -- to being killed. It is a matter of yes or no, and there is no “personal” as opposed to “public” about it. The question is intrinsically, and entirely, public. In whatever we think, say, or do, the love of Christ must be reflected; we must become the mirror of his love so that we might change the minds and move the hearts of all those whom we encounter.

My dear brothers and sisters, in this Holy Mass we have asked for the grace to remain faithful to this sacred trust and steadfast in safeguarding the dignity of human life. I thank you for your many prayers and sacrifices offered to further the culture of life and encourage you to continue to live as Christ’s disciples who proclaim the Gospel of life through your words and actions. To you the words of the Lord are rightly addressed: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” Luke 11:28). I urge you not to lose hope if the fruit of our efforts seems at times to be small. Keep your eyes fixed on Christ! “Look to the LORD in his strength [and] seek to serve him constantly!” (Psalm 105:4). May God give us this grace. Amen.