

**March for Life Diocesan Pilgrim Mass
January 27, 2017**

**St Peter's Church
Washington, D.C.**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, and deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is with mixed feelings that we gather for this Mass in our nation's capital on the 44th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision of *Roe vs Wade*, in which abortion was made legal in our country. During these days, we gather to recall the fact that more than 60 million unborn children in the United States have been deprived of the gift of life since 1973. We are also surrounded with visible reminders, statistics and stories of the gravity of this evil that infects our country. Our March for Life immediately after this Mass reminds us of our duty to be steadfast in prayer and promotion of the Gospel of Life here in our nation's Capital.

Reflecting on this reality, I am reminded of a friend's story in which he encountered an image with a message that had a profound impact on his life. When walking around a college campus my friend saw a young man with a shirt that boldly proclaimed, "I am a survivor!" Intrigued as to

whether he survived a life-threatening disease or possibly a natural disaster, my friend inquired as to the meaning of the slogan. The young man boldly said, "I am a survivor of abortion," and began educating my friend on the fact that he had lost almost one-third of his generation to this legislated evil. One third of an entire generation of men and women! Imagine for a moment, all of the potential marriages, religious vocations, friendships, children, grandchildren, sisters and brothers, acts of charity, inventions, sports championships, world records and world leaders that have been lost to abortion in this young man's generation.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand here today at this celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist as survivors! This is not to say that our parents were faced with the decision to have an abortion. It is to say that WE are the faithful that God has entrusted with the responsibility for defending life from the moment of conception to natural death. We stand as survivors in a culture that does not promote life. As survivors, we have to be the voice to the voiceless, we have to pray for those who have no one praying for them, we have to be witnesses to the defense of life!

It is very appropriate that our first reading today is a charge to the Christian community to hold steadfast in their faith in the midst of persecution. The Letter to the Hebrews boldly reminds the early faithful, “At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and affliction; at other times you associated yourselves with those so treated.” This community was facing expulsion from Rome, under the reign of Emperor Claudius, but more importantly they were losing their focus on Jesus Christ.

How easily we can relate to the situation in the Letter to the Hebrews after government administrations here in Washington, in various state capitals and around the world have sought to expel any defense of life, pro-life legislation and religious liberty from the public debate. How discouraged we may feel when our state legislature continues to ignore attempts to promote pro-life legislation. How frustrated we may feel when celebrity fads and internet sensations get more attention in mainstream media than the hundreds of thousands of people Marching for Life.

Easily, we could be discouraged these days, but this first reading reminds us not to “throw away your confidence (since) it will have great recompense.” We are reminded to continue the fight in defense of life since, “We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among

those who have faith and will possess life.” We are never without hope because we walk with the Lord, not only these days of the March for Life, but every day as Members of the Body of Christ. It is this hope, firmly rooted in the Lord, which motivates us to continue to press forward in standing up for the rights of the unborn.

Yet, with hope on our hearts, the Letter reminds us that the battle in defense of life requires “endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised.” We need to ensure that we are not passively waiting, but actively praying for the conversion of hearts towards life. You might be saying to yourself, “how can I change the heart of a person contemplating an abortion,” or quite possibly you’re saying to yourself, “how I can change the heart of my representative promoting a legislated culture of death?” Our Lord gives us a very simple formula in today’s Gospel for all of us to follow when promoting a culture of life.

In today’s Gospel we hear a parable in which Jesus describes the Kingdom of God being “as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how.” It is this simple and profound parable in which we’re

given a formula for promoting a culture of life: planting a seed, but doing it with faith in the Lord.

Recently, I encountered this formula when completing the 2016 Philadelphia Marathon with the Life Runners, a group of runners dedicated to using their passion for running to promote the Gospel of Life. Before the marathon, our group spent time praying outside one of the most active abortion clinics in downtown Philadelphia. Standing outside the gates, quietly praying, we were met with some positive affirmations, but many hostile comments. A woman exited the clinic with such hostility that she screamed at our group. We didn't respond to her hostilities, but we remained quiet and prayed. For some reason our simple act of planting a seed of the importance of life, combined with prayer, had profoundly impacted this woman.

As we prepare to begin the March for Life, we leave with a simple formula of planting seeds for the Gospel of Life. Some of these seeds may be as visible as this woman that we LIFE Runners encountered in Philadelphia, but others might be unseen events happening across the country. We may not see the fruits of our seeds for the Gospel of life that we are planting, but as survivors we stand and work for those who have no

voice, so that there will be a brighter future for tomorrow that defends all human life as made by God in His own image and likeness.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist at this Mass, we ask the Lord for the spiritual nourishment that we need to go forward and, with faith, to plant seeds for the culture of life. May our reception of our Lord motivate us today and every day to be His faithful disciples, boldly proclaiming the Gospel of life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.