

**Homily for the Mass for the  
Diocesan Pilgrimage to the March for Life**

**January 18, 2019**

**Saint Peter Catholic Church  
Washington, District of Columbia**

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

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Mass in conjunction with the diocesan pilgrimage to the March for Life.

We gather this morning in joy, aware of the Lord's presence among us, especially in the Eucharist, but also in one another. At the same time, we also gather in sadness as our hearts and minds turn to the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*.

As you are aware, this infamous decision legalized the killing of unborn children in our country through the abhorrent practice known as abortion. Since that dreadful day on January 22, 1973, more than 60 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 2.9 million Americans have been killed in all the wars in which this country has fought since 1775. Put another way, the number of children killed by abortion in this country is greater than the present populations of the States of Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee combined. To put it even more starkly, in the same span of time in which more than 60 million children were aborted in our land, just over 164 million were born. The number is staggering, and terribly sad.

This is why, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I am deeply grateful to each of you for your invaluable witness to the beauty and dignity of every human life from conception to natural death. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for joyfully embracing the sacrifices involved in making this pilgrimage to our nation's Capital to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

In a particular way, I am grateful to the young people gathered here; your enthusiasm and your joy are apparent to all of us. This is, I am sure, no small part of why so many adults have gladly joined with you on this pilgrimage once again this year. As your Shepherd and spiritual Father, I encourage you never to lose your enthusiasm and your joy for the faith. It is

my hope and prayer that this experience will inspire you to follow Christ more perfectly as His disciples and proclaim the truth of God's love to those around you!

Just a few moments ago, in the passage from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, we heard the familiar story of the rich young man who approaches our Lord and asks Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Our Lord replies to him: *If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.*<sup>1</sup> After the young man responds that he has indeed kept all of the commandments, our Lord challenges him to do one thing more: *Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*<sup>2</sup>

Dear pilgrims from throughout the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, like the rich young man in today's Gospel passage, we too, are invited to overcome the temptation to buy in to the materialistic and self-centered culture in which we live and to turn our eyes and our hearts to those around us, especially those from whom we shy away or who are pushed to the margins of society.

After the march, as you return home, I encourage you to continue the fight for life by constantly seeking to find ways to heal the culture. This begins by looking at ourselves and seeing ways in which we may not be following our Lord as His disciples and then striving with renewed purpose to respect our own dignity as well as the dignity those around us, who are created in the image and likeness of God.

As difficult as it might be to board a bus and ride overnight across several states, only to march in less than ideal weather, it will be even more difficult to live your faith every day in a culture that is often indifferent, and indeed sometimes hostile to that faith. However, being faced with a challenge did not deter the saints from pushing forward, for they took very seriously the words that Jesus gave to His disciples at the Sermon on the Mount, where He told them:

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Neither should we be deterred, for that same promise is given to us as we are sent out to be disciples of our Lord in the midst of our world today.

Therefore, as we prepare to receive the Eucharist, which is a foretaste of that heavenly treasure promised by our Lord, let us be renewed in our commitment to follow Christ as His disciples, both today as we march, and every day as we seek to spread the truth and beauty of the Gospel of Life to the world around us, so that our culture will become one in which every life is seen and treated as a masterpiece of God's creation, worthy of life and worthy of love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:17

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:21

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:11-12