

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

January 24, 2020

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

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

- I. It is good to be with you as we have made this pilgrimage to our nation's capital for this annual March for Life.
 - A. Today is also a special day for me personally as it is the 17th anniversary of my appointment as bishop.
 1. On Friday, January 24, 2003, it was announced that I and two other priests were appointed as Auxiliary Bishops of Chicago.
 2. As January 24th is the feast day of St. Francis de Sales, he has always had a special place in my heart.
 - a. He became Bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1602, a very challenging time as many people at that time had gone over to Protestantism.
 - b. He is said to have won 72,000 Calvinists back to the Catholic faith!
 - c. The key to his success is found in a saying attributed to him: "It is easier to catch bees with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar!"
 - d. His book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, was ahead of its time in promoting what we now call "the universal call to holiness," that is, it is not only priests and nuns who are called to be holy, but also everyone regardless of their state in life, whether they be farmers or tradesmen, soldiers or carpenters. It is a book still well worth reading today.
 - B. Turning our attention to the March for Life, we pray in this Eucharist that the Lord who will come into our hearts in Holy Communion will remain with us and walk with us as we bear witness to the value of human life from conception to natural death.

1. When I told the ticket agent at the airport that I was flying to Washington, D.C. for the March for Life, she told me that she had gone to the March for Life years ago when she had attended a Catholic high school.
2. When she said that, it was a reminder to me that many of you may be attending the only March for Life during your lifetime.
3. Even if you have been here several times, there are some important lessons to be learned on this pilgrimage that should last a lifetime.

II. First, it is important to keep in mind that we always start with ourselves.

A. Our innate tendency seems so often to start with looking at the sins of others.

1. It is easy to cast stones at others.
2. Perhaps we have even come here thinking that our primary purpose on this trip is to confront other people who support abortion.
3. Expressing our opposition to abortion and promoting respect for unborn human life are indeed major objectives of this pilgrimage.
4. But we must start by looking deep into our own lives to examine our consciences and identify those areas of our own hearts that need cleansing.

B. We may protest that we are absolutely opposed to abortion, so what is there to examine within my own heart?

C. The answer to that question is to examine whether we are indeed pure of heart.

1. Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."
2. If our minds are full of images of pornography and other distractions, we will not be able to see God clearly, if at all.
3. Our goal is to see God someday in heaven face-to-face, but even here on earth those who begin to see God clearly are called mystics.

III. In this regard, we must look at the connection between an impure heart and abortion.

A. We may be able to say confidently that we would never procure an abortion, but can we say that we have eliminated all temptations against chastity from our hearts?

B. Now you may be thinking that I am getting sidetracked, i.e., abortion is a sin against the 5th commandment, "Thou shall not kill," not the 6th commandment.

C. But the path to abortion usually starts with sins of lust, sins against purity.

1. You may be convinced in your mind as an intellectual concept that you are against abortion, but what if you have a child out of wedlock, and feel that you are either too young or you do not have enough money or cannot accept the responsibility to raise a child?

2. Even if you are married, what if you are expecting a child and are told by your doctor that the fetus has been diagnosed with a disability, such as Down's Syndrome?

3. Will you try to make an exception for yourself to rationalize having an abortion in these circumstances?

D. To speak against sins of impurity is not to speak negatively about sexuality.

1. Sexuality is a beautiful gift from God to be used properly within marriage for procreation. What a wonderful word: procreation!

2. To procreate it to create together with God. All of us are here because our parents have cooperated with God's creation in bringing us into the world!

IV. Once we have examined our own hearts, we can begin to look at how to bear witness to the gift of life and challenge those who attack life.

A. Hollywood support for abortion.

B. The news media's support for abortion.

C. Government officials' support for abortion.

1. Legislative branch, e.g. Illinois General Assembly abortion bills in 2017 and 2019.

2. Judicial branch, e.g., *Roe v. Wade* and California case against David Daleiden.
 3. Executive branch, e.g., Governor Rauner signing 2017 bill providing for taxpayer funding for abortion; Governor Pritzker promising to make Illinois the most abortion-friendly State in the Union and his signing of the 2019 bill declaring abortion to be a “fundamental right.”
- V. Having examined our own hearts, let us ask God to help us in our efforts to change the minds and hearts of others to respect all human life from conception to natural death.

May God give us this grace. Amen.