

Monthly Pro-Life Mass and Prayer Vigil Ordinary 4b - Saturday

Star of the Sea Church

4 February 2012

Dear Fathers, dear friends in Christ dedicated to defending and fostering human life:

Introduction

On this first Saturday of the month when we recall the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with her maternal love for each of her children conceived in his or her mother's womb, we gather together to pray for a cause that is sacred: to bring about the end of terror against unborn children, their mothers and the social fabric of our nation.

Before saying a few words about the readings appointed for this morning's Mass, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you for your perseverance in prayer and witness in the defence and fostering of a culture of life. I know that very many of you come out month after month – and even year after year – to express your conviction that human life begins at the moment of conception and to pray for the conversion of those who either fail to see or who mock the sacred value of life given us as a gift of God.

How crucial, indeed how irreplaceable, is the witness you bear to the wonder and beauty of the every life even when it is surrounded by surprise, hardship and suffering.

What a great blessing it is for our Archdiocese and for the whole

Lower Mainland that we have so many and such diverse pro-life initiatives: in education, assistance, counselling, lobbying, and here today of public witness and prayer. Before the Lord, I thank you for your selfless dedication and the often heroic sacrifices you are making to ensure that Canadian society remembers that “respect for life is the first form of justice to apply.”¹ Thank you for being followers of Christ who are “prophets” of the truth that God alone is the Lord of life. As the Holy Father has said, “Every person is known and loved, wanted and guided by him. Here alone lies the deepest and greatest unity of humanity: in the fact that every human being puts into practice God’s one plan, originates in God’s same creative idea. One thus understands why the Bible says: whoever profanes man, profanes the property of God (cf. Gn 9: 5).”²

Discerning Good from Evil

One of the most difficult spiritual tasks of every person is the ability rightly to discern good from evil – and, when discerned, to follow our conscience and do what is truly good. Undoubtedly, in the case of abortion, for example, that discernment is relatively, but not always, easy. In the circumstances of everyday life, however, we often wonder: what should I do? What is the right thing to do in this particular situation? The Word of God today offers us some guidance.

¹ Benedict XVI, Address to Members of Italy’s Pro-Life Movement (12 May 2008).

² Benedict XVI, Address to Members of Italy’s Pro-Life Movement (12 May 2008).

The First Reading presents to us the figure of King Solomon, conceived through the sin of David with Bathsheba, but now the successor of David, his father. It presents him at the very beginning of his reign, when he was still very young, “only a little child” (1 Kg 3:7), he says. Solomon inherited a very demanding task, and the responsibility that lay heavily on his shoulders was great for a young king. He first of all offered God a solemn sacrifice, “a thousand burnt offerings” (1 Kg 3:5), as the Bible says.

Then, as is common in the Scripture, the Lord appeared to Solomon at night in a dream by and promised to grant him what he asked for in prayer. What would you ask for if such an occasion presented itself? Long life? Health and prosperity for yourself and your family?

But here we see the very greatness of Solomon’s soul. He did not ask for a long life, nor wealth, nor the elimination of his enemies. Instead he said to the Lord: “Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart – our translation says ‘mind’ – to govern your people, able to discern good and evil” (1 Kg 3:9); that is, to distinguish right from wrong. And the Lord heard him, so that Solomon became famous throughout the world for his wisdom and his right judgements.

When the youthful king prayed God to grant him “an understanding heart,” what do these words mean? We know that the “heart” in the Bible does not only indicate a part of the body, but also the centre of the

person, the seat of his intentions and opinions. We might say today: the conscience. Thus an “understanding heart” means a conscience that knows how to listen, that is sensitive to the voice of truth and for this reason can discern right from wrong.

In Solomon’s case, his request was motivated by his sense of responsibility in leading a nation, Israel, the people whom God chose to show the world his plan of salvation. The King of Israel, therefore, had to try always to be in tune with God, listening to his word, in order to guide the people on the paths of the Lord, the path of justice and of peace.

However, Solomon’s example is valid for every person. Each one of us has a conscience so as to be, in a certain way, a “king,” that is, to exercise the great human dignity of acting in accordance with an upright conscience, doing what is right and avoiding wrong.

The moral conscience presupposes, first of all, the ability to hear the voice of truth and to be docile to its indications. Those who are called to the task of government have an even greater responsibility since their actions affect so many and, therefore – as Solomon teaches – are in even greater need of God’s help. That is why we must pray for them if we are to eliminate the scourge of abortion.

Yet each one has his or her own part to play, in the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. In fact, the true quality of our moral life and of social life depends on the upright conscience of each individual, on the

capacity of one and all to recognize what is right, separating it from what is wrong, and seeking with determination to put it into practice. In this way we make a significant contribution to building the culture of life and justice to which we aspire.³

The secret of acquiring “an understanding heart” is to train your heart to *listen*. Perhaps this is why Our Lord, in the Gospel, tells his busy disciples returning from their first mission to “come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while” (Mk 6:31). They needed a place to listen to meditate on the Word of God.

We all of us need to be more firmly rooted in this Word and to persevere in getting to know it better if we want to discern God’s will, to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. I urge you – as does the Holy Father repeatedly – to become familiar with the Bible, and to have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow. By reading it, you will learn to know Christ and therefore, as his friend, be able to make the discernment so necessary to our lives. Note what St. Jerome said in this regard: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” His word is “a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). Reading, study and meditation of the Word flows into a life of consistent fidelity to Christ and his teachings. Thus we shall be also “be doers of the word, and not

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (24 July 2011).

merely hearers who deceive themselves. (Jam 1:22).⁴

This morning, then, let us ask for the wisdom of Solomon in all that we do, but perhaps especially in what we are doing in the pro-life movement. We pray that we shall always wisely discern the right course of action to follow, secure in the conviction that if it is God's will that we do, then it will bear fruit.

As we continue this Mass this morning, let us entrust this and our commitment to unborn life to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. In this Eucharist we live the truth and the truth lives with us: Christ's Body and Blood, that Body which took flesh from Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit, and was born of her for the salvation of the world.

_ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message to Young People for the 21st World Day of Youth (9 April 2006).