

## **Advent 1-A**

### **Pro-Life Mass**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

30 November 2013

Dear brother priests and dear friends in Christ who treasure, safeguard and foster the sacred value of all human life in the Archdiocese of Vancouver:

#### ***Introduction***

At this Eucharist of the First Sunday of Advent, we are celebrating our annual Mass for Life. And it is fitting that we do so at the beginning of the Church's liturgical year. Advent is the season that commemorates the coming of God among us, the closeness of the One who created us, who guides our history and who cares for us to the point of becoming man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. This great and fascinating mystery of the God-with-us, indeed, of the God who becomes one of us, is what we celebrate in the coming weeks journeying towards Christmas.<sup>1</sup>

However, during the first weeks of Advent, the Church also draws our attention to the end, as we shall hear in the Scriptures, but less our own end in death than the end of human history, the awesome "coming of the Son of Man" (Mt 24:37). Advent, then, is the season of life. It commemorates both its end and its beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers (27 November 2010).

At this Mass we pray in a special way that reverence for life will increasingly be realized in our country. Tonight we acknowledge publicly and with firmness that every human life enjoys inherent dignity from the first moment of its existence to its natural end. And, on this last day of the month of November, dedicated particularly to the commemoration of the faithful departed, we pray for all the victims of the anti-life mentality and practice which unleashes such tragic consequences and moral upheaval in Canada. We pray for the unborn, the aged and the disabled, as well as all others who suffer, perhaps not unto death, because of our heartless disregard of the “least of our brothers and sisters.” Nor can we fail to pray for those who perpetrate such evil. Indeed, we pray especially for them, that, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans, they will “lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of life” (Rom 13:12).

But our prayers are not only those of petition but also those of thanksgiving for the graces the pro-life movement so alive in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. I thank each and every one of you and each and every of the different groups and organizations. Each one has its own charism and ministry. When we work together sharing a common mission, we act as the Body of Christ, and together we are effective messengers of life.

While for Christians our convictions about the inherent dignity of

human life have their basis in God's lordship over creation, we also believe that our convictions are well founded in human nature and the laws which govern it. That's both why and how we engage in public discussion and debate. Our convictions about human life are not simply matters of intra-ecclesial interest, as are teachings on the divinity of Christ or the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Despite a relentless secularization which attempts to restrict the convictions of faith to the private and personal sphere, we Catholics believe that the truth of the moral law taught by Christ cannot be so confined, as if it were intended only for believers. As the Holy Father has written in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel," released this week: "It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfilment in eternity, for he has created all things "for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17), the enjoyment of *everyone*."<sup>2</sup> And that "everyone" includes unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us as well as the dying.

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 182.

Listen to what Pope Francis has written in *Evangelii Gaudium*, his most explicit statement to date on the evil of abortion, a statement which should lay to rest any criticisms which have been directed at him in this regard. He wrote, and I quote him exactly:

Nowadays efforts are made to deny them [unborn children] their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church's effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defence of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, "every violation of the personal dignity of

the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the creator of the individual” (Blessed John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 37).<sup>3</sup>

Then, to seal the deal, to make his position absolutely clear, the Holy Father added: “Precisely because this involves the internal consistency of our message about the value of the human person, the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question. I want to be completely honest in this regard. This is not something subject to alleged reforms or ‘modernizations’.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 213.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 214.

Regarding abortion, for example, we can affirm that “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away. The acceptance of life strengthens moral fibre and makes people capable of mutual help.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, to defend the truth about life, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it are indispensable for all those working for a just and authentically inclusive society. We rejoice with those who assert values such as the dignity of the person and social justice, but we reject and cannot fail to point out that they act contrary to their convictions “by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.”<sup>6</sup> Defending human life, striving to secure the common good which corresponds to the truth and hence to the real needs of our brothers and sisters, whether believers or non-believers, is an exercise of the Christian virtue of charity, of love of neighbour.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Culture of Waste***

Already in his short pontificate Pope Francis has grabbed the world’s attention by his acts of compassion extended to the disabled, the

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 93.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 7.

downtrodden and the marginalized. These actions reflect his firm teaching on the dignity of human life. By way of explaining himself, the Holy Father often frames his observations in light of what he refers to as the “culture of waste,” one opposed to a “culture of acceptance, solidarity or compassion.” I think that if we can understand this culture of waste, then we will better understand the underlying dynamic of why so many people make the wrong choices. While we certainly reject the anti-life consequences of the pollution caused by a culture of waste, we might well foster it or even be partially seduced by it. How has it infected me?

What is a culture of waste? It is a “disposable” culture which considers human beings as consumer goods to be used and then discarded. Worse even than exploitation and oppression, it is something even more nefarious. Such a culture deliberately excludes some persons. Like Nazism, It calls for the elimination of human beings, especially if they are physically or socially weaker. They are no longer merely exiled to society’s fringes. Rather, they are no longer considered even a part of society. They are “the outcast, the ‘leftovers’.”<sup>8</sup>

This widespread mentality of the useful that today enslaves the hearts and minds of so many comes at a very high cost to society. “The victims of this culture of waste are precisely persons who are the

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<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

weakest, the most fragile.”<sup>9</sup> “Human life, the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are not yet useful – like the unborn child – or are no longer of any use – like the elderly person.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Francis, Address to the Sick and Disabled Children at the Seraphic Institute, Assisi (4 October 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Francis, General Audience (5 June 2013).

Our clear and articulate and practical response to this mentality must be a decisive and unreserved “yes” to life. Things have a price and can be bought and sold, but human persons have a dignity. They are worth more than things and they are above any price. All too many situations arise where what is least valued is life. That is why concern for human life, especially for the most defenceless, is so vitally important and why your efforts to promote the transcendent value of every life is such a service to the Lord, to the Church and to society as a whole.

In a frail human being, unborn or suffering at the end of life, each one of us is invited to recognize the face of Jesus, who in his human flesh experienced the indifference and solitude to which we so often condemn the most vulnerable. “Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born, and then just after birth, experienced the world’s rejection. . . . And every elderly person, even if he is ill or at the end of his days, bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded, as the ‘culture of waste’ suggests! They cannot be thrown away!”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

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<sup>11</sup> Francis, Address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (20 September 2013), 2.

Therefore, I urge you, dear friends and workers in the pro-life movement in our Archdiocese, to continue to be valiant witnesses and diffusers of the “culture of life.” Whenever the occasion arises, tell others of the transcendent dimension of human life, of the imprint of God’s creative work which marks everyone from the first moment of its conception. Remind them that dying is not a “medical act” that needs a physician’s assistance to end it. These and similar initiatives, dear friends, are a task of the new evangelization that often requires going against the tide and even paying for it personally. The Lord is counting on you to spread the “Gospel of life.”<sup>12</sup>

And may the maternal love of Our Lady of Guadalupe strengthen your hearts and give you the courage necessary to replace the culture of waste with a culture of acceptance, solidarity and mercy!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>12</sup> Francis, Address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (20 September 2013), 3.