

Advent 1-C
Pro-Life Mass

Holy Rosary Cathedral

1 December 2012

Dear brother priests and dear friends in Christ of pro-life in the
Archdiocese of Vancouver:

Introduction

In this evening's Eucharist we are praying in a special way that reverence for life will grow and increasingly be realized in concrete ways in our city, province and nation. We are celebrating the sacred value of all and every human life from the first moment of existence to its natural end. We are praising the God of life, the God who gives life. Indeed, in the words of Pope Paul VI, "despite its hardships, its hidden mysteries, its suffering and its inevitable frailty, this mortal life is a most beautiful thing, a marvel ever new and moving, an event worthy of being exalted in joy and glory."¹

We are praying in thanksgiving for the graces you have received to stand up for life in so many different ways: from the 40 Days of Life, to helping mothers deal with a crisis pregnancy, to lobbying governments to protect human life, to educating our fellow citizens about the moral

¹ Paul VI, *Pensiero alla Morte* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1988), 24; cited in John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 84.

and social harm to society already caused by abortion and that would be caused by the legalization of assisted suicide. We are also praying in supplication: that as committed individuals and as an Archdiocese we may become more effective messengers of hope to a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people's hearts.² We are praying, too, for a deepening in us of the virtues of courage and compassion: that we may we grow in appreciation of the fact that the Gospel of life is as well always the Gospel of mercy which we are called to embody in all our dealings, helping those who fall to be restored to friendship with God.³

Advent

We are now at the beginning of Advent, the season during which we recall the coming of Christ in our midst in two ways: in the mystery of his Birth celebrated at Christmas and, as today's liturgical readings recall, his coming "with power and great glory" (Lk 21:27) at the close of history as our righteous judge (cf. Jer 33:16). This Second Coming appears to be a little less comforting, as it is described in apocalyptic language in the Gospel: "People will faint from fear and foreboding of

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, New York (19 April 2008).

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to Participants of an International Congress Organized by the John Paul II Institute for Studies for Studies on Marriage and Family (5 April 2008).

what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lk 21:26). Here we are not looking at Jesus’ coming as a Baby in his Mother’s arms but as the Judge, the Son of Man for whose coming, we must be “alert at all times” (Lk 21:36).

This Judge who will return at the end of time has left us the responsibility of living in this, our beautiful yet often sad and tragic world, in accordance with what he has taught us. This is what St. Paul told us in our second reading: “just as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God . . . you should do so more and more” (1 Th 4:1). “And it is today, in the present, that our future destiny is being played out. It is our actual conduct in this life that decides our eternal fate.”⁴

It is because of the very seriousness of our lives and of the choices we make that the Apostle also exhorts us to “abound in love for one another and for all” (1 Thes 3:12). This evening allow me to reflect with you on the intimate connection that exists between the “abounding in love” as this is expressed in your selfless dedication to fostering the culture of life and the Church’s social doctrine with its commitment to justice by pursuing “charity in truth.”

⁴ Benedict XVI, Angelus (9 December 2007).

Social Doctrine: Fostering Justice and the Culture of Life

It is of fundamental importance for all of us in the pro-life movement to have a profound understanding of the Church's social doctrine, since her teaching on justice is strongly rooted in the affirmation of the human person's transcendent dignity. In brief, "it is necessary to witness concretely that respect for life is the first form of justice to apply."⁵

Anything that affects human life and dignity is of concern to us as Catholics. That's why the followers of Christ are involved in efforts to stem the tide of violence and war, to alleviate poverty in all its forms in our Downtown Eastside, to implement more humane ways to handling the incarcerated, to promote fair treatment of immigrants and migrant workers, to advance access to education, to eliminate every form of unjust discrimination, to assure that people have the opportunity to work and that working conditions correspond to their dignity, to reject unethical practices such as assisted suicide and euthanasia, and to restore in law the right to life of the unborn threatened by abortion. The challenge for us is to see all these through the lens of the Gospel, so that the consistency of the Church's social doctrine can be recognized and appreciated.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Address to Members of Italy's Pro-Life Movement (12 May 2012).

These and many other issues are all related to the Church's social doctrine since they all concern the human person and his or her inherent dignity as a child of God. Because the center of all these issues is one and the same, they are all inherently complementary aspects of an integral whole. They are related as various parts of the body, one to the other. Catholic social doctrine is an essential part of the Church's mission of evangelization.⁶ And at the heart of that teaching insofar as it expresses her concern for social justice are the life issues. Embracing the fullness of Catholic teaching necessitates a deep concern for all men and women who are vulnerable. But it also leads us to recognize that some are more vulnerable than others, and undoubtedly the most vulnerable are those in the womb. If we cannot secure the most fundamental right to life, then there is no basis for any other right at all. About this there is no doubt: from its conception, the child has the right to life. Direct abortion and intentional euthanasia are grave contradictions of the dignity of human life and the respect due to God, our Creator. Because the embryo should be treated as a person from conception, the pre-born child must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed like every other human being.

If the cause of fostering an end to abortion is not part of the

⁶ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 66.

Church's call to pursue justice, then our movement has no grounding in the Gospels. As we know, Jesus never explicitly mentions abortion. In the Beatitudes, he doesn't say "blessed are those who "hunger and thirst after the rights of the unborn will be satisfied." Rather, he tells his followers that "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6). Any attempt to separate the pro-life cause from the work of justice would cut it off from the work of the Gospel.

Teaching of "Caritas in Veritate"

While Pope Benedict has not yet written an encyclical specifically on life issues – though he has spoken at length about them – he has written something very important in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, "Charity in Truth." He was inspired by a passage in St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, in which the Apostle speaks of acting in accordance with truth in love, of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). The Pope explores the connections between charity – concern for others – and truth – what has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ, who is himself "the truth" (Jn 14:6).

Charity and truth are inseparable. For this reason, the entire social doctrine of the Church revolves around the principle of doing charity, that is acting lovingly, by following and adhering to the truth. He wrote: " Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity

be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith.”⁷

But if truth and charity are necessarily linked, so too are justice and charity. If we are to act with love, we must also act with justice. True love of neighbour cannot be selective. Charity begins with justice. “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just toward them,” Benedict writes. “Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity and intrinsic to it.”⁸ Charity demands justice, even though it transcends it.

Moreover, the Holy Father emphasizes the unity between the protection of life and the pursuit of justice in all its various forms. Justice is an integral part of what it means for us to love “in truth and action” (1 Jn 3: 18).

What the Pope wants to make clear in his encyclical is that there is *one* Catholic moral and social doctrine, which addresses the protection of human life and its dignity, the defence of marriage and the family, the protection of the poor, the pursuit of economic justice and the practice of solidarity. All are interrelated. Listen carefully:

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 3.

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 6.

respect for life . . . cannot in any way be detached from questions concerning the development of peoples. . . .

Openness to life is at the center of true development. When a society moves toward the denial or the suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good. 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.⁹

It is my sincere hope that we will see with increasing clarity that there can be no division between those who advance the Church's social doctrine and those who attend to her pro-life teaching. They are truly inseparable, though individual Catholics may, given their limited time and particular gifts, dedicate themselves more to one dimension or another.

All of us need to ask the Lord for increased courage to speak the truth about the inherent dignity and sacredness of human life ever more clearly, but never with hatred or disrespect for persons. We must be firmly convinced that this is the truth sets people free (cf. Jn 8:32) and

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 6.

to proclaim it is an act of charity. To be pro-life then, to defend the right to life, means to stand up for the truth, especially the truth about the God-given dignity and worth of every human being. It is very encouraging to see how many people of good will in our Archdiocese embrace the truth wholeheartedly and are willing to proclaim and act on that truth.¹⁰

Conclusion

We are now about to approach the Lord's altar of sacrifice and there place our own labours and life, our prayers and sorrows, our joys and anxieties there with the gifts of bread and wine. In the Eucharistic Prayer they are lifted up and transformed into Christ's Body and Blood, nourishment for all of us pilgrims on the way to the final glory of the Kingdom of God. An once nourished we are sent forth: to glorify the Lord by our lives of living the truth in charity and justice. And we are not afraid. May the guiding and protecting love of the Virgin of Guadalupe accompany us on our journey!

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¹⁰ Cf. Blessed John Paul II, Address to the Participants of the Seminar Sponsored by the International Right to Life Federation (1 March 1986), 2.