

Critical Life Issues Being Faced in the Season of Lent

High Court to Hear from Catholic Dioceses, Little Sisters of the Poor, Priests for Life and Others

Father Frank Pavone, National Director of Priests for Life, issued the following statement regarding the U.S. Supreme Court decision not to hear heartbeat bills from North Dakota and Arkansas that would protect babies from abortion once a heartbeat can be detected.

“Anyone who still questions when life begins has to at least admit that **when a human heart is beating, life has begun**. The Supreme Court’s unfortunate decision not to review the North Dakota or Arkansas cases regarding heartbeat laws means continued delay in protecting those beating hearts.”

“In the meantime, we at Priests for Life are making our voice heard in the Supreme Court regarding the Texas case, which will be argued on March 2 and in which we are submitting a friend of the court brief. Moreover, we have the court’s attention in our own Priests for Life case against the HHS mandate, which the Court has accepted and will argue in March as well.” [www.priestsforlife.org, 1/25/2016]

Since 1868, the Little Sisters of the Poor have operated numerous nursing homes for the elderly poor in the USA. **The federal government wants the nuns to file paperwork** necessary to get contraceptive coverage for their employees. Otherwise, they will be fined severely under the Obama administration’s Health & Human Services mandate.

The Sisters’ lawyer at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty has argued that the **mandate violates their religious liberty**, as guaranteed under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). That federal law directs the government to pass laws that don’t substantially burden religious freedom without a compelling state interest. [National Catholic Register, 1/24/2016]

It would be helpful to their cause to include in **our Lenten prayers** intentions for the petitioners to the Supreme Court.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, headed by Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, KY, warned that the failure to include robust conscience protections against participation in abortion is a cause for grave concern. He said: “The principle at stake is whether people of faith and others who oppose abortion should be compelled to participate in them.”

[CatholicBeaconPatersonDiocese.org, 1/21/2016]

Striving to Attain Equal Rights for Babies in the Womb

Bringing together pro-life leaders in NJ and NY, Christine Flaherty of LIFENET reported that a statewide effort is being undertaken to **end abortions in New Jersey past 20 weeks** (post-fertilization) by the year 2020. This would be accomplished by garnering public support for the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act. Scientific evidence indicates that babies developing in the womb can feel and react to pain at 20 weeks.

According to a recent report, experts say that reproductive education has contributed to an overall decline in abortions in Europe. Abortion is legal only in the first trimester in most European countries, even if with some restrictions. [New York Times, 1/17/2016]

One of the goals of the New Jersey campaign is to have a mass said once each month in every Catholic church. Parishioners of every parish are urged to request a Sunday mass be offered “For the protection of babies in the womb” but, if not available, a weekday mass will do. An individual parishioner can do this for each month, or a group can join together to do this.

More information on this ongoing project will be made available in the coming months. (LIFENET letter, Jan.2016)

Dear Abby Apologizes

Correcting an error she had made, saying that the Church always saves the baby over the mother, Dear Abby printed a letter from Sr. Carol Keehan, Pres., Catholic Health Assoc.

“Catholic policy is abundantly clear on the **dignity of both mother and baby**, and makes no priority of one over the other. Catholic hospitals operate with the same standards of safety in maternity care [as] non-Catholic maternity programs Catholic hospitals must adhere to the same robust standards as every other maternity service in the country. The dignity of the life of both mother and baby are critically important to all those serving in Catholic health care.” [Newark Star-Ledger, 12/30/2015]

Abortion Linked to Bipolar Disorders

Women with a history of abortion are three times more likely to suffer from bipolar disorders, according to a new study published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*. [Post-Abortion Review, Summer/Fall 2015] Scientific findings like these imply connections but do not determine causality. Pro-life advocates often say abortion hurts women just as it critically harms their unborn child.

40 Days for Life

This month, 40 Days for Life will kick off in 273 cities in 23 countries ... with new locations, including Glasgow, Scotland and Hong Kong.

From Ash Wednesday, February 10, through Palm Sunday, March 20, 40-day campaigns of prayer and fasting, community outreach, and peaceful vigil will help save lives and change hearts at the local level.

And you're invited! Find the 40 Days for Life campaign closest to you at <http://40daysforlife.com/browse-campaigns/> For many years, according to Shawn Carney, Director, "we have seen God save babies from abortion, change the hearts of those working in the abortion business, help those who have had an abortion find hope and healing ... and close abortion centers." So why not devote say, one hour per week, to this local campaign? It would be a good Lenten practice.

Stranded on Highway: Mass in the Snow!

As you may have heard, a Catholic pro-life student group going home after the March for Life got stuck on the highway. "It was incredible," said chaperon Fr. Patrick Behm of All Saints Parish in Iowa. "Easily one of the highlights of my time as a priest." His group and several other big groups from other schools got stuck near the mile marker 133 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

They were there for nearly 22 hours because of an accident involving two tractor-trailers that blocked all of the westbound lanes of traffic. In the time it took to clear this accident, the snow in turn rendered the road impassible and the vehicles immobile. With tons of time and not much to do, they did something incredible: they built an altar out of snow and had Mass on the side of the highway. Some people nicknamed the spot the St. John Paul the Great hillside chapel.

Credit for the idea, and credit for building the altar, and credit for going around to the various buses inviting people to join them, belongs completely to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, particularly Mr. Bill Dill, their youth minister. It was those students who built the snow altar.

Tweeted Anastasia Rogers: So amazing to be apart of #turnpikemass one of the coolest things I've ever done. Maggie Schopp tweeted: Stuck on the PA turnpike for 17 hours, but celebrating mass with hundreds of other stranded pilgrims! #turnpikemass [ChurchPop.com, 1/25/2016]

Empowering Women at Crisis Pregnancy Centers

"Statistics show that 64 percent of women who have had an abortion would have chosen to keep their babies if just one person would have encouraged them to do so." So wrote Marge Fenelon regarding pregnancy centers around the nation. Jenny Langness, a center director, said: "We are the ones saying, 'You absolutely can do this; you totally can do this. We believe in you; we believe you're going to be a great mom, and we believe that you're going to have a wonderful life with your child. You'll still be able to fulfill your goals. It will be a little harder, and you might need some help, but you can still do it.'"

It is a common misconception that pregnancy centers are only interested in saving the baby. True, they don't want to see the baby aborted. But they go to great lengths to offer ongoing support for mother & child, & post-abortive women by connecting them to community resources for continuing assistance. [*Our Sunday Visitor*, 1/17/2016]

When someone is pregnant, she is not "expecting a child" – she already has one. She is not "going to be a mother" – she already is a mother. The baby is not "on the way," the baby has already arrived. If we are to change the way society treats unborn children, we have to change the way we talk about them. Fr. Frank Pavone, 7/7/12

Pope Francis on Forgiving Abortion During the Jubilee Year of Mercy

"The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails. Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe they have no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope.

The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it." [*Our Sunday Visitor*, 1/17/2016]