

January 22, 2019

12:10 p.m. Mass

St. Augustine Cathedral

Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life:

46th Anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Decision legalizing abortion

A Day of Prayer and Repentance

(Is.49:1-6; Mt.18:1-5,10,12-14)

“Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” – that was the question “the disciples” asked Jesus. We just heard St. Matthew tell us what Jesus’ response was – He called over a child, placed the child in their midst, and said: ‘Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven’.”

We probably all think that was very precious for Jesus to do that, as probably the disciples did at the time. But, He didn’t really answer the question about who was the greatest – or did He?

What Jesus told us was very important – we know that it was important because He began by saying “Amen” before He answered – which was another way of saying: OK – this is really important – pay close attention!

What Jesus did was tell us what it takes to “enter” the Kingdom of Heaven – what we have to do before we can even be a part of the Kingdom. What is that? Remember, Jesus said: *“unless you turn”*. Let’s stop there. What does it mean to “turn”? We have to change – do something different – take another path – or as we might say, go thru a conversion of mind and heart. That’s what Jesus told us we must do at all times – that’s what the Lenten Season, which will begin in less than 6 weeks, tells us to for 40 days – “turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel!” So, first of all we must turn away from sin/change our heart/convert ourselves.

Then, Jesus tells us, we must “become like children”. Really? How do we do that?! Let me give you an example. This past Sunday afternoon at the Ecumenical Prayer Service for Life, a young mother and her beautiful little daughter gave a brief talk to witness to the mother’s commitment to life, even though she was strongly encouraged to have an abortion. Then, she turned to her little daughter who, with great poise, said: ‘Hi, I’m Anna Lynn and I’m 6 years old. I’m in Kindergarten. I love to color, swim, and spend time with my family.

And (as she looked up at her mother and beamed) my Mom is the best Mom in the whole world.'

I'm pretty sure that Jesus would have used little Anna Lynn as His example of what it means to "become like children" – not "child-ish", not silly, not irresponsible; no, children who love and adore their mother; or in our case, "spiritual children" who love and adore our Father in Heaven, His Son and our Brother Jesus, and are guided in the ways we need to live our lives in God's ways according to their Holy Spirit!

That's how we "enter" the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps Jesus is saying that there's no "greater" or "greatest" in the Kingdom; perhaps He was answering the question by saying we're all great when we enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Today, we pause to lament – to grieve – to remember the lives of the estimated 59 million unborn babies whose lives were aborted over these 46 years since the Supreme Court decision in 1973 that made it a legal right to procure an abortion just about at any point along the 9 months of pregnancy – who never saw the light of day – who never had the chance to speak their first word – who did not get to become "little children". That is a national tragedy. That is a huge loss of human life!

In the face of other tragedies, we often times ask people to pause for a moment of silence. To convey the enormity of what the number "59 million" is, our Michigan Right to Life group pointed out that if we paused for a moment – one minute – for each of those 59 million babies who have been killed, it would take 40,972 days, or 112 years to do so; even if we paused for only a second to remember each of those 59 million babies, it would take 683 days, or the better part of two years to do so.

And yet, abortion remains our legal right.

We come together today to pray for an end to that tragedy; we come together to collectively ask forgiveness for that sin; we come together to try to make reparation for that awful loss, and to renew our commitment to give witness to our commitment, not just to pause and remember in silence, but to speak out forcefully against this evil, and to speak up courageously for those who have no voice to speak for themselves.

Even as we do so, we realize that there are louder and more forceful voices, including much of the media as we have been seeing in the controversy about the young Catholic High School students from Covington, Ky. who were in Washington for the March for Life. While the media typically ignores the March for Life every year, and refuses to give any news to the fact that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people of all ages, and all faiths, brave the bitter January elements every year to give peaceful witness against the evil of abortion, the Media were quick to jump on this story, somehow turning the story to be about “Catholic” kids, who, they alleged, were ridiculing Native American protesters; though as it turned out it there was much more to the story, and it was clearly something very different. Unfortunately those young people are now being threatened, their school is closed for security reasons, and their lives may be affected permanently – all because the media distorted the facts, while ignoring the issue at hand – that these young people were giving witness for the protection of unborn life and advocating for a greater respect for all human life.

Standing up and speaking out takes courage, and it doesn’t happen without consequences, especially in these days of bitter acrimony among those who have differing opinions. But just to be able to “enter the Kingdom of Heaven” – just to get in – Jesus tells us what we need to do: “turn away from sin” – become child-like – and bravely choose to follow God’s ways.

As Isaiah the Prophet proclaimed so beautifully in today’s First Reading: *“The Lord has called me (each of us) from my mother’s womb, and we are made glorious in the sight of the Lord....to make us a Light to the nations, so that God’s salvation can reach the ends of the earth.”*

We have every reason to believe that those 59 million aborted babies are experiencing the greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven even now. May we do what it takes to be among them one day.