

In May 2009 a man with extreme anti-abortion views shot George Tiller to death. Tiller was one of a few physicians in the country who performed late-term abortions. By law, he was required to obtain a second opinion on each case, and now the doctor who gave those opinions has been criticized for judging that the patients faced "substantial and irreversible impairment of a major physical or mental function." The list included these: a 15-year old who believed her pregnancy would jeopardize her chances to become a professional rodeo barrel-racer; another 15-year old girl who gave up basketball because, "It's like it's not fun anymore." Still another 15-year old wanted to finish school, but told Tiller's staff, "I will get kicked out if I'm pregnant." Five other teenagers expressed similar fears. Tiller's colleague approved abortion in these cases for these reasons: acute anxiety, acute stress, or major depression. I will never know what shock a 15-year old feels when she's pregnant, and we should all stop anything we've done to build a society that creates such fears in our youth, but I do know that abortion is not a cure for anxiety, stress or depression. Many aborted women regret their actions for the rest of their lives. Some men who have paid for an abortion or helped arrange one feel the same way. None of this justifies the killing of George Tiller, which only illustrates how some people who claim to be pro-life are really only anti-abortion, as they promote the careless waging of war, the increase of our nuclear arsenal, the free usage of the death penalty, and vigilante-style murder.

Each one of us has performed actions we regret. Some are towering in their sinfulness. We may be able to hide some of our past sins, but it is becoming increasingly hard to do so. Record-keeping has improved. People who run for public office especially know that their past misdeeds may come to light. In our culture, some people want to uncover the past sins of others simply in order to degrade or discredit the individual responsible. If we are the guilty party, we just wish the whole business would go away. We can easily understand Psalm 25.

The one who knows all our past deeds, even those that have never become public, is God. How differently God acts with this knowledge. God does not desire the eternal degradation of any one of us, and always stands ready to forgive. That is why today's responsorial psalm has us singing, "Remember your mercies, Lord." The most poignant line comes right in the middle: "The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not." We pray that God, who knows all the sins of our youth, and knows our weaknesses, would forget them, especially the past sins that weigh heaviest on our minds. We sing Psalm 25 today partly because the Book of Ezekiel promises that those who turn from wrong and do what is right will preserve their life; and because in the gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a young man who does exactly that. He starts out rebellious, but ends up obedient.

The Catholic Church joins other churches and humanitarian organizations in taking a strong position against abortion because it destroys the most innocent of human lives. At the same time, we have a strong position in favor of forgiveness. No matter what we have done, how old we were when we did it, who knows about it, and who does not, we believe that God can and will forgive us, offering us another chance to experience the gift of mercy.