

Sixth Sunday in Easter

Missouri Governor Mike Parson on Friday signed into law a bill that prohibits all abortions after eight weeks of pregnancy, about the time a child's heartbeat can first be detected. The law will come into force near the end of August. Governor Parson wrote, "in Missouri, we stand for life, protect women's health, and advocate for the unborn. All life has value and is worth protecting." The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of... existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life" (2270).

Polarization on this topic is well known. Many believe that abortion falls under a woman's right to choose whether or not to have a child, and is therefore a women's health issue. The Catholic Church esteems the values of free will and good health; however, we believe in protecting the child's right to life.

Missouri's law allows no exceptions for rape or incest. Some people who believe in a child's right to life have second thoughts if conception results from rape. In those cases, when a crime led to conception, when a woman has been traumatized by bodily violence, when a nine-month pregnancy and birth would remind her continually of the unholy aggression committed on her person, some people believe that those conditions shift the moral weight and present a situation where abortion becomes acceptable. The State of Missouri is making no such exception, and, as is well known, neither does the Catholic Church. Our position, as articulated in the catechism, is that the child has an "inviolable right" to life - actually "from the first moment of existence," not eight weeks later.

In today's gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am going away, and I will come back to you." Meanwhile, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything." Even so, they must have felt abandoned. An unwanted pregnancy can bring even to other members of the woman's family feelings such as these: Jesus has gone away. He will come back, but he's not here yet. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, has come to teach, but we do not often know the right thing to do, especially in times of crisis. In this passage Jesus gives another gift that such people long for most: peace.

Some say that asserting a woman's right to choose reacts to her lack of power in securing leadership roles, gaining respect as a decision maker, and earning a fair wage. Perhaps if women secure stronger positions in society and in the church, they will in times of crisis more readily embrace solutions beyond abortion. Pope Francis addressed empowerment last month in his exhortation *Christ Is Alive*, following the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment. He wrote, "a living Church can react by being attentive to the legitimate claims of those women who seek greater justice and equality. A living Church can look back on history and acknowledge a fair share of male authoritarianism, domination, various forms of enslavement, abuse and sexist violence. With this outlook, [the Church] can support the call to respect women's rights, and offer convinced support for greater reciprocity between males and females." That's from paragraph 42. By promoting that empowerment, we also promote a world where women who choose life will receive the gift of peace.

Sunday, May 26, 2019