

Thirty years ago this week the United States Supreme Court ruled the case Roe vs. Wade and legalized abortion in our country. Since that time anti-abortion advocates have had virtually no success in changing the law. There is some hope that partial-birth abortion will be declared illegal, but so far even that procedure has not been outlawed, despite the promises of politicians and presidents.

The Catholic Church opposes abortion in all its forms, including IUDs and those birth control pills that prevent implantation after conception, or that stimulate contractions to reject a fertilized egg. We also oppose the so-called “abortion pill,” RU486, which blocks progesterone in the first weeks of pregnancy and provokes a miscarriage.

In the past 30 years the Catholic Church has stood firmly in favor of life. Our message has not been popular, but leaders and churchgoers alike have spoken it fearlessly. As clearly as we state our opposition to abortion, so also we state our mission of mercy. Anyone who has procured an abortion or anyone who has assisted by paying the bill or offering a ride – if they seek the mercy of God, our church is always ready to forgive.

When God first asked Jonah for help, Jonah said no. God wanted Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. Jonah wanted no part of it. He jumped a ship and sailed away. But a terrible storm blew up, and the sailors figured out what had happened: God was angry with someone. So they threw Jonah overboard. The storm died down, and a large fish swallowed Jonah. The fish swam ashore, opened its mouth, and Jonah walked out on dry land. Not just any dry land: The fish brought Jonah to Nineveh.

In today’s first reading God asks Jonah again to prophesy, and Jonah figured this time he might as well. He says one sentence: “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” With that, the people repent, and God relents. Jonah became upset, though. He was hoping to see some good old-fashioned punishment. But God is ready to forgive the penitent.

Sometimes God asks us to be a prophet, to speak up against some wrong. Often we do not much want the job. We’d rather somebody else spoke up. We’d rather watch. But God may ask us to speak up about the value of human life, the needs of the hungry or peaceful solutions to international conflict. God may ask us to confront a friend or break off a bad relationship. When it is hard to say God’s words, we’d rather get on a boat and sail away. But once we do what God wants, we find peace beyond measure. If the words we speak are words from God, they will produce what God wants.