

It's been twenty-five years this week since the Supreme Court permitted abortions in our country. According to the court, abortion is a right protected by the constitution. According to our church, abortion is morally evil and a grave offense. After twenty-five years, thirty-seven million abortions, and the presidential approval of "partial birth" abortions, many people in our country are wondering what have we done.

The Catholic Church has remained at the forefront of this controversy, to defend human life. Our position is that human life is sacred, that it begins at conception, and that it deserves protection. As a church we safeguard the innocent. The poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the sick, and the elderly, because they are created by God, are sacred even if they lack material benefits. When we say we are pro-life, we mean we're for all human life, from the prisoner on death row, to the unborn child.

Pope John Paul has criticized the culture which permits abortion on demand. It's a culture which values convenience and freedom from responsibility, instead of selflessness and respect. Some parents undergo considerable trauma after an abortion as they reconsider the values they hold. Abortions do not happen out of the blue; just as pregnancies don't; they come as part of a pattern of beliefs and behaviors.

The challenge we face as a church is to affirm human life, to encourage responsibility, and to care for all those in need. We believe that sexual union expresses a total gift of self which can only be given in marriage, and that a happy marriage provides the best environment for the growth of children. We also support all those who are expecting a child that they weren't expecting. We rejoice at the birth of a child no matter the circumstances. There may be unplanned pregnancies, but there should never be an unwanted pregnancy; every child deserves love.

I commend the people of our parish who give of themselves to help prevent abortions and to provide care for children in need. Individuals, committees, and councils have taken on pro-life activities including the life chain, a newsletter, and a monthly prayer service; Knights of Columbus help us contact our legislature; families offer foster care to newborns; and we have infant care, childcare, education, and spiritual formation for children in our parish.

When Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth, he unrolled a scroll and read passages from the book of Isaiah which identified the kind of ministry he came to exercise, and the kind of ministry he asked us to do. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he said, "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Our ministry to all the oppressed--to the poor, to the prisoner, to the blind, and to the unborn--is the ministry of Christ.