

For me the challenge of the pro-life movement got summed up in a t-shirt. I saw it in a fast food joint off the interstate near Chicago. Families crowded the restaurant: hamburgers appeal to just about everyone, and it was summer--time to visit relatives, friends, and historical monuments. Beyond the kids playing Nintendo, behind the little girl who had spilled french fries on the floor and ketchup on her dress, there stood a woman wearing a t-shirt that read, "I'd rather be 40 than pregnant."

I'm sure she wore it for the sake of innocent humor, but the message offended me. The message implies that two things are bad: growing old and getting pregnant. But if you could choose one, growing old is better. The message is funny in a society where getting pregnant is a goof and children are an imposition. Now, I'm single and male, so my experience is very different from that of a sexually active woman--I admit that. My point is that I'm part of a society where I see people devalue life. That offends me.

There are two myths about being pro-life. One is that it's a Catholic issue; the other is that it's about abortion. It's true the Catholic Church has led the charge, but others fight equally well. Besides, the Catholic Church is not all that successful: Catholics abort babies at about the same rate everyone else does. And the overall rate is pretty high: 4500 every day in the United States; almost half those are repeat cases, and about 225 women in this country are having their fifth or higher abortion every day. It's not just a Catholic issue.

The other myth is that pro-life means anti-abortion. It does, but it means much more. The pro-life stance consistently judges for life: for the unborn, for the dying, for the elderly, for the disabled, for the prisoners on death row. Are you for the death penalty? You're not pro-life. Are you for nuclear arms, but only in retaliation? You're not pro-life.

I'm all for a law which would ban abortion, but a law will not solve all our problems. Abusing drugs is against the law; rape is against the law. These activities still go on. For me the challenge is not just to change laws; the challenge is to change hearts. I want to change the way people think about human life. I want people to believe in God and to believe that the life of God breathes in every human person--every human person.

Jesus entered Capernaum to preach this same theme: "Reform your lives--change the way you think. The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It's significant that he began his preaching in Capernaum. Life was comfortable in Nazareth, his boyhood home. But Herod had just arrested John the Baptist and would eventually put him to death. By going to Capernaum Jesus entered Herod's territory. It's there he preached his message, "Reform your lives." No one expected the Messiah to begin preaching in the Gentile territory of Galilee. Zion, yes; Jerusalem, yes; the desert, very likely; but Galilee? Finding the Messiah in Galilee is like finding Del Dunmire in Grandview--you just don't expect it.

In our affluent society we don't expect people to challenge our values. We need to keep the message alive: Being 40 is OK. Being pregnant is OK. And every human life is a gift from God.

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