

## 3rd Sunday of Lent

The Alabama Supreme Court recently ruled that frozen embryos are to be considered children under state law, and that the loss of such embryos is the death of human life. Their State legislature is now at work to protect providers and patients. The ruling surprised many people who wondered how anyone could think a frozen embryo is the same as a human person. Many people struggling with infertility have turned to *in vitro* fertilization as a potential solution for their unfulfilled dreams of bringing a child into the world. The news shines a spotlight on an issue that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith addressed in 1987 inside its instruction on respect for human life, *Donum vitæ*, signed by the cardinal prefect, Joseph Ratzinger, who went on to become Pope Benedict XVI. *Donum vitæ* states in part, "Human embryos obtained *in vitro* are human beings and subjects with rights: their dignity and right to life must be respected from the first moment of their existence.... In the usual practice of *in vitro* fertilization, not all of the embryos are transferred to the woman's body; some are destroyed. Just as the Church condemns induced abortion, so she also forbids acts against the life of these human beings."

The Catholic Church supports couples who want to become parents and encourages the use of various means to help them. But Church officials have remained cautious about IVF, both concerning the methods of forming embryos, as well as the fate of many of them. Many Catholic married couples trying to conceive find IVF attractive and are just now learning what the Church has been teaching for decades. Today, by some estimates there are 1 million frozen embryos in the United States alone, and by some estimates 90% of them perish at some point of the process. The scale of the moral dilemma is causing individual soul-searching. People are trying to hold in balance two goods that should be compatible: respect for human life and the desire to have a child.

Today's scriptures offer two examples of similar challenges within the faith. In the opening chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, he admits that not everyone is going to accept the divinity of Christ. "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom," he writes. "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Paul calls Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Another Catholic belief that challenges some people is the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We reserve consecrated hosts after Mass in the tabernacle so they are available for the communion of those who are dying, the adoration of believers, and as extra hosts if we run short during Mass. In John's gospel, when Jesus proclaimed that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood have life eternal, some of those listening to him walked away. When Jesus asked his disciples if they wanted to leave, Peter spoke up. His words are the refrain we sang with today's responsorial: "Lord, you have the words of everlasting life."

Whenever we face difficult situations, we turn to the words of everlasting life for guidance. The Catholic Church aims to help people protect human life, become fruitful in their love, and to find sustenance in the Eucharist. Whenever we seek the power of God and the wisdom of God to resolve moral conflicts, we will find them in Christ.