

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE SUNDAY

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SANIBEL, FLORIDA

January 22 marks the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision “Roe vs. Wade,” which, with its companion piece “Doe vs. Bolton,” effectively made abortion-on-demand the law of the land. Since that time 1.5 million lives a year are lost to the abortionist’s hand. Over forty million lives have been lost since this tragic piece of legislation went into effect. But as stunning as this loss of life is, perhaps the greatest negative effect of the Supreme Court decision is on the very moral fabric of our society, for the cheapening of human life finds itself reflected on the front pages of our newspapers each and every week. We do not have to search very hard to see that as a society we have devalued human life as a whole. In the last two weeks since the terrible shooting in Tuscon our local papers have reported the abuse of a three year old burned and locked in a closet for days on end, and nationally it brought to our attention the doctor in Philadelphia charged with eight counts of murder, seven of those being full term infants killed outside of the womb.

Society seems stunned by this increasing violence and is sometimes moved to ponder what the root causes of the violence could possibly be. Surely there are no simple answers, and the violence we read about almost daily is likely the result of a strange mixture of genetic, family, cultural, and environmental conditions which cause violence to explode in the lost unexpected of ways. However, on this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday I would like to suggest that the cheapening of human life which we see reflected on the front pages of our newspapers is surely something that has connections with the abortion-on-demand mentality that began thirty eight years ago. As a nation how can we be surprised when human life is treated as a disposable commodity, for we have so numbed our consciences that we describe the taking of an innocent human life as a *right*, as a *choice*!

Today we pause to remember not only the 1.5 million innocent lives that are yearly snuffed out by abortion, but we also pause to highlight all those things that threaten human life at any of its stages – increasing support for euthanasia, insensitive welfare reforms, child and spousal abuse, stem cell research, capital punishment – all of the life issues are worthy of our reflection. But it seems to me that there is no issue more urgent than the abortion issue, for 4,400 lives will be taken today and every day by the abortionist's hand.

It was in 1981 when I experienced an intellectual conversion that led me to get involved in the pro life movement. I was living in Washington, D.C. and doing graduate work at The Catholic University of America. I knew little about Roe v. Wade since I began my time in the monastery the year before the case was decided. In my earliest days in the monastery you had no access to television, radio, newspapers or magazines. Indeed, up until my ordination 35 years ago no young monks had any direct connection with the media, and so the enormity of what had happened in 1973 was lost on me. In 1980 I vowed to go down when the annual March for Life was taking place in D.C. in order to see first hand just what a peaceful march was all about and to see the kinds of people involved in the March. It was the aftermath of the March that disturbed me the most since the media never accurately described what actually took place. The numbers always seemed to be distorted and seldom did they portray those involved in the March as ordinary men and women like us. I vowed from that moment on to do what I could for pro life issues, including founding the first pro life group at St. Anselm College. I spoke as boldly and honestly as I could about the pro life issues, and eventually became the Chairman of the Board of Directors for American Collegians for Life, a national college pro life organization.

One of the sorriest parts of being involved in the pro-life movement is encountering men and women who just don't care about life issues, abortion in particular. And further, there are few things more discouraging than encountering priests and religious who lack any kind of passion for the unborn. As already stated, in a society where violence continues to escalate all of us need to be concerned about anything that devalues human life, and nothing cheapens life more than abortion. So many in our society, sadly, are deceived and fooled into believing what is categorically not true. Allow me to comment briefly about four areas where I believe those in favor of abortion-on-demand are still trying desperately to fool you.

Many in this nation have been fooled into believing that until the baby is born, or in the early stages of development, it is nothing more than cells and tissue, not a fully human person, just a part of the woman's body. The medical community, however, is virtually unanimous in its refutation of such nonsense, for human life definitively begins at conception. All of the genetic information necessary to build our bodies and our brains is present at that moment. Nothing will be added to this unique individual except food and nourishment, love and caring.

There is no one sitting here this afternoon (morning) who did not begin life as a zygote, as an embryo, as a fetus. The pro abortion attempts to personalize the "babies" by using such medical terminology is an attempt to fool you into thinking that there is something other than human life present in the pregnant woman. The preborn child is not just a part of the woman's anatomy – it has its own genetic code, different from that of the mother. One's body does not belong to another's body merely because of proximity. A car is not part of the garage in which it is parked! A loaf of bread is not part of the oven in which it is baked! Furthermore, to suggest that you are more human at a later stage of your prenatal development is ludicrous, for it would force us to conclude that babies are less human than adolescents, or teenagers are less human than adults.

Secondly, some have been fooled into believing that the unborn child's right to life is less than the woman's right to do what she wishes with her body, that a woman has a right to choose whether to

“terminate her pregnancy,” that as unfortunate a choice that abortion is I have no right to restrict the access of other’s to abortion. The pro abortion crowd would have us believe that what we have in the abortion debate is a dilemma concerning rights, and in this dilemma the rights of the mother take precedence. But if we are correct that it is a human person in the womb, then how can one decide that one’s person’s rights should take precedence over another person’s rights, especially over the most fundamental right to life? Indeed, the preborn’s dependence on her mother is not enough of a reason for us to overlook his or her own right to life, any more than the dependence of an infant or a toddler is reason enough to consider that child less than human and thus capable of being killed.

Thirdly, certain individuals have been fooled into believing that it is more important to have a “wanted child,” that having unwanted or unplanned children results in an increase in child abuse, and that people, especially the poor and minorities, who don’t want their children shouldn’t be forced to keep them. In the early seventies people argued that legalizing abortion would solve the problems of child abuse by making every child born a “wanted child,” but in the first ten years after the legalization of abortion in America child abuse increased by over 500 percent. By the 1990’s there were 2.5 million reported child abuse cases per year, fifteen times more than in 1973. One can only imagine what those statistics are today when you can find child abuse cases on the front pages of our newspapers every week. Abortion is, in fact, the most radical form of child abuse, for you can do no more harm to a so-called “unwanted” baby than by killing it.

Finally, many have been fooled into believing that if the U.S. gets out of the abortion business thousands of women will die from so-called back alley abortions. Like so much of the pro abortion rhetoric, this is nonsense. Prior to its legalization in 1973 ninety percent of abortions were done by physicians in their offices, not in back alleys. In 1972 abortion was still illegal in eighty percent of the country, yet only 39 maternal deaths from abortion were reported that year.

It is risky, even for a priest, to speak about abortion or any of the controversial life issues, but it is an issue which needs to be confronted honestly and with a great deal of sensitivity. No one condemns the unfortunate woman who so desperately chooses to abort her own child. She is driven by fear, confusion and despair – what that woman, and every woman who has experienced the pain of abortion, needs is compassion.

I encourage you never to be lost in the hype that surrounds so much of the abortion debate. Find the truth about all the life issues, for a society which is increasingly violent needs the truth – not platitudes, not soundbites, not distorted media representations. Unborn children are the only class of human beings in our society that have absolutely no protected rights under the law – not even the right to live! Who will speak for these children? They are silent, hidden, and defenseless. We are the only voices those children will ever have. Let us use our voices to change the hearts and minds of all those who favor, promote, seek, or perform abortions. Being pro life is not an option for those who call themselves Christian – it is a duty!

Fr. Christopher Senk