

TERRI'S DAY - HOMILY MARCH 30, 2012

First of all, I would like to extend a deep and heartfelt greeting to the Schindler family from *Priests for Life* National Director, Fr. Frank Pavone. Due to the ongoing baffling situation of his recall by his bishop to restrict priestly ministry to the enclave of sisters in the Amarillo Diocese, he regrets that he cannot be here with you this evening. Amidst all of this he remains patiently obedient to his eternal credit. Fr Pavone has admirably stood firmly in thick and thin of Terri's whole saga playing out up to minutes before Terri died. Most of you are familiar with his poignant accounts of those final days and hours where he drew on the power of the cross in prayer with you. His appraisal of the legal and moral implications is legendary, and as we will see, flows into the events that we are witnessing from Washington this very day. All the members of *Priests for Life* are with you in spirit this evening. Thank God for you!

Allow me also to extend to you my own personal greetings, Bob, Mary and Terri's family for the valor and long suffering, your steadfast faith along with a transformed grace in which you have beautifully been witnessing to educating the world about your beloved daughter and sister Terri and the consequences of a morbid culture which solves life's inconveniences by discarding people from the table of life. Your family continues to reach out through the *Life and Hope Network* to people all over the world about the timely issue of protecting innocent life from the ever-encroaching legal and medical twists and turns which have led us down the path of disposing human beings when they have somehow fallen short of the standards of others. We at *Priests for Life* are proud to team with you in this ongoing and universal effort of education and activism.

I fear that for the average person the crisis period that gripped our nation leading up to the final week of March 2005 in Pinellas Park, involving day and night media, Florida's legislature, state, and federal and courts to Washington, with the intervention of both Governor Bush and President Bush, and then the courts, and the country then riveted on Terri's plight - I am afraid many have forgotten the impact of your keeping the flame of life and hope flickering. Not just for Terri, but as it turns out for the country as well.

But we haven't forgotten and we never will forget, will we!

The slow month of March 2005 was slow and deliberate judicial mortal blow not only on Terri, but a blow to the dignity of her indefatigable parents, family and friends, and on the country as well. It put into place a Jeremiah's "terror on all sides" no less than the terror visited upon our nation on "9-11." Both were about murder, and both carried deep social

implications, and still do. One came from a foreign manifestation of murder, the other from within our very courts from whom the responsibility to follow God's law is greatest. We will never forget! And I applaud you for the love you manifested then even in the struggle to make sense out of not illness of incapacity which Terri endured, but the intent of ridding her outright. This patient love turned to efforts to bring about a renewed culture of life today. This goes on in the Life and Hope Network, with a strong ally in Priests for Life and many other pro-life initiatives and organizations.

"I hear the whispering of many: Terror on every side! Denounce, let us denounce him!... Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him." (words from this evening's first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, 20: v 10). ... In the Name of the Father and of the Son and....

Dear friends, in gearing us up for the week called Holy, Holy Mother Church this evening's first reading from the prophet Jeremiah provides us with a glimpse into an age-old drama that culminates in the death of Jesus Christ Our Savior. Jeremiah represents prophecy in what he teaches, but also in who he is: a victim for God. The model for this of course is Jesus Himself: *who though he was in the form of God did not deem equality with God as something to be clutched. Instead he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. He humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, even death on a cross.* (Philippians 2:6-8). The drama of Passiontide begins to unfold before us and we catch the foretelling of the hatred and bitter rage, intrigue and deceit that will catapult the events to Calvary next Friday. We are witnesses to the basest side of human nature in these excerpts. Note also in the book of Wisdom another assessment of the wicked:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us... Because his life is not like that of others ... He judges us debased he holds aloof from our paths... Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him... With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. For according to his own words, God will take care of him... (Wisdom 2: 12-22)

These vicious words of the Old Testament will be rejoined and repeated on the unsuspecting lips of the Sanhedrin and religious leaders in Jerusalem on that first Good Friday. Was it blasphemy they were looking for to trap him? Was it refusing to render to Caesar his due to instigate Roman Crucifixion? It doesn't matter: be done with him. *Away with him. Crucify him.*

The culture of death adherents visualize Christ as that *obnoxious nuisance*; a light that burns unadmitted evil rather than illuminating good. Whereas they see persons like Terri as *dispensable*, since request after request made by the family to the courts to return her right to nutrition had been rejected. Even so, in some way the culture of death sees Christ as *dispensable* as well. They see Terri and other severely impaired people with *disdain* too. As a nuisance. They are a challenge to one's cultivated way of life. Indeed that was the case of the drama of Holy Week upon which we are now embarking.

On the other hand, the world is also not without many loving parents and friends like the Schindlers, the Brother Paul O'Connells, and the Father Pavones, and even blessed John Paul II, who you will remember knew about Terri, his fellow sufferer in Florida and who released his spirit before the throne of the Father's Mercy two days after Terri's death.

I vividly remember offering Holy Mass on that street in front of the facility where Terri was kept in a room with shades and blinds covered, along with others praying on that Tuesday of Holy Week - people from all over the country and Canada - for an end to this court-imposed travesty and a hoped-for, decent return to sanity. I remember a young boy was arrested among others and cuffed for trying to bring a glass of water to Terri. And then there were the questions asked of me and others by the media, TV network people, some struggling, some shrugging, some slugging away at stories for the evening news, many in competition as bloodless as the court ordered dehydration that was going on inside the facility. Like Holy Week, much was instigated hearsay passed on as rumors, like Holy Week, many had hopes dashed like the disciples going to Emmaus saying: "We had hoped that He was the Messiah and..." "We ought to remove her to another juridical jurisdiction where things might be more favorable...." The moment of truth set in. And on March 31 it was over. *Or was it?* On Good Friday it was over, *or was it?*

In August of 1942 there was another instance of ordered starvation which unfolded when in Auschwitz a person had escaped from the Lager - mind you a person with no crime committed and already unjustly paying a forced price of separation from home, dispossession of goods, and unmitigated animalistic debasement by the enlightened *Urbemensch*. The others were suffering in the same inhumanely unjust situation. The camp officials rounded up the already starving prisoners and the now legendary figure of St Maximilian Kolbe stood in the stead for another man randomly drawn from the whole lot who had already been standing all day long. He volunteered to fill the quota of 10 to 1 the Nazis sadistically meted out to these unfortunates because of the escapee. The method of death was starvation in a sealed cell. St Maximilian Kolbe was the last to die. On August 14 it was all over. *Or was it?*

In the case of the Polish Franciscan martyr, he was soon greeted by the Queen of the Assumption, his beloved Mother Mary, and in a sense as Cardinal Wyczinski, primate of Poland during the next bout of oppression, Communism, would say: “he ended World War II.”

The movement from Good Friday to Easter is difficult for people without faith and hope, as it is difficult for the same faithless mind set to grasp the meaning of attending to a person whose faculties are gravely limited, whose brain is severely damaged, and who is seen as putting a further burden on a society that values utility over the gift of life itself. Certainly not when the economy is down.

Today’s first reading reveals the intrigue and deception in the heart of those who could not cope with Jesus, while a week from today, Good Friday, we will see in the unfolding of the liturgy, the Death of the Lord that assured Eternal Life. These people knew better, the signs were spelled out, but they wanted to reshape God’s plan to fit their desires. How tragic and certainly in some way or other we can all say: there but by the grace of God go I. Save me from myself, Lord!

Jesus put it clearly in His mystical prayer of priestly unity in John’s Gospel: *“I have given then Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”* (John 17:14)

The cross must be part of our lives of course. But it must likewise be part of our interaction with church, culture and government as well. We are not to become hermits or monks or nuns, not by and large at least. Pentecost didn’t follow with a party in the upper room, but the Holy Spirit drove the Apostles under the mantle of Mary out to the streets. The first Pope Peter’s first homily succinctly gave those thousands hearts he inspired the solution: **CONVERT. CHANGE YOUR HEARTS!**

In our work to educate and activate, the mix of church-nourished Gospel *principle* must be the source, not the recipient of the culture. The Church’s treasure of the Gospel of Life needs to *inform* the culture, and government, generally not the other way around. The original meaning of the WALL of separation of Church and State - which we must remind all - is nowhere found in the Constitution, though admittedly it has a certain validity if understood correctly – the WALL is to keep the forest from encroaching on the garden. The garden is the richness of moral and scriptural treasure that the Church through the world, held long before America was even imagined. It renders beauty and the deepest reflection of what God’s saving power can be in us as individuals and as a nation. In this regard our late Holy Father Blessed John Paul the Great was fond of singling out America’s greatness while elsewhere warning of its slippery slope towards its undoing:

“At the center of the moral vision of [the American] founding documents is the recognition of the rights of the human person . . .” The greatness of the United States lies “especially [in its] respect for the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and at all stages of development.”

Today, March 30, shares also as the day of **fasting and prayer** for Religious Freedom that the bishops of the USA have chosen to respond to the Health and Human Services Mandate, an attempt to dictate or regulate the insurance coverage. Letters of strong criticism from all the bishops of the country have been sent to the appropriate authorities; TV and blogs have demonstrated the fact that the Church will not allow the intrusion of the state to tell churches or church-run institutions what commodities it must buy. It should be made clear to all that the issue is not about whether the Church will allow for contraceptives, abortifacients and sterilization to be part of insurance its institutions adopt; something we will resist. It is to be met for what it is: an intrusion into the liberty of religion. **And we will resist them!**

There is a strong connection here to the situation of Terri’s death: government ***force*** to enact intrinsic evil. As Fr Pavone likes to distinguish: there is a difference between *policies* and *principles* governing those policies. It’s often the difference between means and ends. The option for the poor is a principle rooted in many passages in both the old and new testament and in the living tradition of the Church in all ages. But how this is carried on is a point of discussion and debate, healthy to our own political climate. Engaging in differences that are both acceptable morally is a good thing. The problem comes when the principles are morally questionable or flat out evil. The same of course can be applied to the court in its deliberations or to medicine in its own judgment based on the principle of “do no harm.” Or in the media with the moral principle of doing no harm to ***reputation, detraction or slander***, skewing the truth or refashioning words to mean different ideas: “pro-choice,” “abortion rights” “product of conception”, “permanent vegetative state” “death with dignity,” and a host of other misleading mis-truths. Is the message to advance moral good or moral evil? These are questions that at the heart of the issue are about moral *principles*, not *policies*. So in the case of abortion and euthanasia or contraceptives and abortifacients, sterilization or tubal ligation, one need not discuss policies of how to, when the issue at hand is immoral principle against the fifth or sixth commandment. Such policies must be proscribed! **And we will resist them!**

Whether government through the courts mandates a dehydration and starvation sentence on a brain-damaged woman, or whether it mandates abortion coverage in an insurance package even at the puny \$1 rate for each tax payer as now discovered in the Obamacare law , or

whether insurance companies must cover contraceptives and the rest in the package mandated, these policies violate principles and as immoral must be rejected. ***And we will resist them!***

One can easily trace how we got from free sex, contraception explosion, abortion, assisted suicide, mandated dehydration, and now the Peter Singer touted infanticide, already practiced in Holland; sex without babies led to babies without sex and same sex without babies; and social security without supporting grown up babies. We reap what we sow. And scanty sowing reaps a scanty harvest, a Demographic Winter as the DVD by the same name chillingly portends. And now a bullying government thinks it can get away with telling us how to conduct our religious principles, not just policies. ***And we will resist them!***

There is a continuum of a downward spiral in all this. But there was a downward spiral in the abuse given to the Lord in Holy Week as well. *If the world has hated me it will hate you*, Jesus has told us clearly. This has played out in many ways, over the course of Christian centuries, both in the martyrdom of individuals as well as the brutal annihilation of ethnic groups, such as the Armenians by the Turks, the African tribal blood baths, the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and Mexican persecutions in various centuries, to say nothing of the genocides of millions in Nazism, Bolshevism, and Imperial Japan. Much of this can be visualized against the backdrop of a looming bully that hates the Truth when it represents displacing saturated evil : now it is the grim reaper, if you will; or in the case of abortion: “pick on someone your own size” never fit the bill more accurately. ***And we will resist this!***

And in the very present: I was in Washington DC at a press conference this past Monday of the National Clergy Council or Faith and Action, where we all agreed in a meeting that we would not back down, that Christians should fight back in defending the truth and moral upright, and not back down. As one strong voice in the Detroit Stand Up for Religious Freedom March 23 rally bellowed in his electrifying speech: Christians are not seeking peace amidst wrongdoing; we see righteousness. As Father Frank indicated elsewhere in this: “Let us move forward with resolve, creativity, boldness.” Speaking of which, in 149 cities around the country, people of all faiths gathered to express concern about the HHS mandate. Where was the media coverage? Did you see anything on that? Or the March for Life with its hundreds of thousands gathered in San Francisco and Washington DC? Practically complete media blackout of the truth when it defends Life. For shame! ***And we will resist this!***

In the end it is not just about religious freedom. We know that, we recognize that such a freedom fits squarely with the rights that we have, though not one of the three enumerated by the Declaration, the first of which, ***LIFE*** is most indispensable. Take it away and there can be no right to anything else, because there would be no experiencing of that other right. That makes utmost sense.

Yet in another sense the right to ***RELIGION*** is most fundamental, for it is the reason for the right to life. We receive our dignity in that we are made in the Image and Likeness of God. In the end the debate centers on: are we reflective of the Law of God in our lives, are we seeking TRUTH and responding in LOVE in our very being or do we remake God to fit our picture of who we think he should be. If so we have as a culture endorsed fully and diabolically the *dictatorship of relativism* that Our Holy Father coined in his transitional homilies shortly after Terri's death; that is, in the interim between pontificates. Then everything is a worthless opinion, certainly nothing to live for or for that matter to die for.

We have inherited the enlightenment humanist concept of RIGHTS. We must remember that for centuries Judeo-Christian teaching was about RESPONSIBILITIES - DUTY, from which flowed our rights. Not only has this been reversed in our jurisprudence, but often responsibility is not even inculcated. It remains an option. The responsibility to defend life and the right to life go hand in hand. And that applies through the entire spectrum from conception to natural death. Natural death, not assisted suicide, nor euphemistically "mercy killing." *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.. (1Cor 6:19)* We are not our own, the unborn is not the mother's ownership; nor is the gravely incapacitated person his or her own; even less is that person the ownership of a hospital committee such as envisioned in the Obamacare plan; and worse, in the judgment of Judge Greer or anyone else. In Holland even born infants are being killed in facilities with impunity. No, none of our rights, even the right to life, can be divorced from the responsibility to God who is the Author of Life. Without that, no human law can stand. It must crumble. It is precisely that issue which will bring the present healthcare issue into further relief, regardless of the outcome of this most important Supreme Court case in generations: will we follow God's plan that assure the right to religion and the right to life once we submit to the responsibility of righteousness. A country that looks for rights without responsibility to God will perish. But defending the right to life and religion is indeed our responsibility. And like the intrigue and ugly deceptions rendered in Jeremiah's narrative and in the ushering in of the Passion of the Lord, we will continue to find those who want us to fail, to take delight in our being unfairly singled out by a fact-

twisting media when it suits their overall amoral approach; or avoiding our courageous testimonies and solidarity when that would advance our cause. No, we must echo the original courage of the Apostles after Pentecost: 1) change your hearts and you will be saved; and 2) do this in the Name of Jesus Christ. Or with Peter again in Acts of the Apostles before the police: *Do whatever you need to do with us: but know that we will obey God rather than man, - or mandate we might add right now.*

Today, which will it be, a facile peace that avoids controversy or righteousness? Which shall it be? Will the easy peace of hospital committees formulated apart from the mind and heart of the patient pull the plug, or will it be righteousness recaptured in God's Image and Likeness?

At the end of our last day here below we all hope to echo : *Father into your hands I commend my Spirit.* On the Way, may we always maintain the power of Mary's presence, and just as she was present to her suffering Son on the Way to Calvary and then beneath the cross itself, she will favorably answer those words repeated hundreds of thousands of times over in our lifetime: *"Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death"* AMEN!

Let's conclude with this week's prayer of Pope Benedict in Cuba where the suffering body of Christ is deeply hurting. and seeks relief from another government of oppression:

Invoking the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, let us ask that each time we participate in the Eucharist we will also become witnesses to that charity which responds to evil with good (cf. Rom 12:51), offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to the one who lovingly gave himself up for our sake. Let us walk in the light of Christ who alone can destroy the darkness of error. Amen.