

January 17, 2010

Who of us is not deeply moved by the miracle of birth? The very sight of a newborn infant brings joy to our heart and a smile on our face. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this well: “Every child brings us God’s smile and invites us to recognize that life is His gift, a gift to be welcomed with love and preserved with care always and at every moment.”

Every child is a unique and irreplaceable creature designed by the God of Love. Every little boy or girl is God’s personal gift that comes to us bearing His image and likeness. For that reason, we hold that the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a fundamental dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race or gender, age or economic status.

When Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass in St. Patrick’s Cathedral on April 19, 2008, he proclaimed: “The Church is called to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life, and to promote a culture of life. This is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people’s hearts.”

Friday, Jan. 22nd, marks the 36th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* which legalized abortion on request throughout our nation. These decisions denied protection to the most vulnerable among us, our unborn children, and dealt a devastating blow to the most fundamental human right – the right to life.

Catholics from across the country, including a significant delegation from our diocese, will celebrate Masses in Washington, D.C. and march to witness to

our core belief in the God-given dignity of every human life from the moment of conception.

The most basic right to life requires constitutional protection and cannot be subject to the arbitrary choice of others. Nor can government legitimately deny the right to life or restrict it to certain classes of people. Our Declaration of Independence promised that our nation would respect life as first among the inalienable rights bestowed on us by our Creator.

While we may not be traveling to Washington, D.C. this week, we must all pray and lobby to bring an end to the abortion culture which claims one million lives each year in our country. In the words of Pope John Paul II, we must pray “that our time, marked by all too many signs of death, may at last witness the establishment of a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love” (The Gospel of Life, 77).

We bishops in the United States have designated Friday, Jan. 22nd, a Day of Penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. Please plan ahead perhaps to attend Mass on Friday or to observe abstinence or some other form of penance to promote the culture of life.

Our prayers and witness do make a difference. The poll conducted by the Pew Research Center during this past August 11-27, reveals less support for abortion among most demographic and political groups. Prayer, penance, and witness will continue to make a difference.