

**Italy and the March for Life**  
*Talk given to Priests for Life pilgrimage group*  
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Dear Friends,

We find ourselves at a crossroads in the life of Western civilization, where Family and Life are the core issues being debated. I would like to start out by looking at Italy's situation, and then move on to more general observations.

Italy is a profoundly Catholic country that has been at the center of universal Christianity ever since the beginning. That is why the communist theoretician Antonio Gramsci elaborated a strategy whereby power would be attained by the historical compromise between Marxists and Catholics. Gramsci believed that Marxism would triumph in Italy not by fighting the Church but, with the Church, or rather, with the collaboration of the catholic party – which in Italy was the Christian Democrats. But from the 1960s onward a process of secularization occurred in Italian society -- as in the West -- with a crucial turning point occurring in the revolution of 1968. That year, in Italy as in the West, the social-political sphere began to delve into that of the individual and familial.

1968 was in fact a cultural Revolution that proposed to radically challenge all forms of legal and moral authority – at the individual, as well as the societal level -- “liberating” the desires of the individual from the constraints imposed upon it by civil society. This was an effort to take the Marxist revolution from the socio-political level to the interior life of the person, transforming daily life, habits and, if possible, the very essence of the human being. For Marx, as for Darwin, the human person is malleable because it is always in a state of evolution. Communism, before being a socio-political system, is a concept of the world - a materialistic and evolutionary anthropology.

The path of secularization that begun in 1968 had in Italy two important phases: the legalization of divorce in 1972 and of abortion in 1978. The two laws were proposed and advanced by the socialist and communist left with the support from catholic circles.

In 1978, when abortion was legalized, the President of the Republic was a “democristiano” (Christian Democrat) -- Giovanni Leone -- and the government was headed by a “democristiano” Giulio Andreotti. Both Leone and Andreotti ratified the abortion law, which was passed by a parliamentary majority. They could have refused to sign the law, in the same manner that King Baldovino of Belgium did. However, Andreotti justified their actions on the grounds that if he had not signed onto the law his party, the DC, would have lost the presidency of the government and this – Andreotti had the audacity to say – would have been a greater evil than that of abortion. These words allow you to understand the climate of compromise surrounding the introduction of abortion in Italy.

This mentality characterized the first and most important pro-life action that arose in Italy which was the MpV (Pro Life Movement), an emanation of the Democrazia Cristiana, and thus did not oppose abortion with much strength. The MpV conceded the possibility of abortion in exceptional cases, such as “therapeutic” cases, and always refused to promote public protests against abortion laws. Instead, their idea was not to have a public confrontation with those who advocated for abortion, but to negotiate with them so as to come up with a political solution.

From 1992 onward the DC disappeared from Italian Politics; however, this mentality of defeatism and compromise continued to characterize the catholic world here, including many bishops. The indications given by the Italian Episcopal Conference to the MpV were not much different than those received from the DC: avoid conflict, concede so as not to lose. But, as it always happens, it was ceded hence it was lost. This strategy, though, has been shown to be a complete failure. Abortion was and remains a bleeding wound; now, younger generations have begun to battle against abortion without conditions and without compromise.

What are the reasons for the development of the new prolife movement? One of the first, I believe, are the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. JP II, with the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* and BXVI with his renewed calling back to non-negotiable values, first of which is life, have profoundly illustrated the reasons for engaging in this battle, even at the level of doctrine. These popes, referring also to the pontificate of Pius XII, taught that there exists a “natural law” written upon the human person’s reason and heart. The natural law precedes the positive law articulated by the State. Parliaments and law-making bodies must recognize this natural law, which is valid in every time and place, and cannot make laws that contradict it.

A second reason, in my opinion, is also very important: the use of internet, permitting the youth to free themselves from political parties and traditional structures so as to create new groups based upon the recognition of natural law and the defense of life. The internet has given voice to a people that in the past was not able to present its own arguments in the public square and, still today, is an important tool for connecting people.

The birth of the new prolife movement in Italy owes much to the example of those abroad, and, above all, those from the USA where, for more than 40 years, each year, thousands upon thousands march in Washington to affirm the right to life without exception and without compromise. I have participated several times in this great march in Washington and the experience there was decisive in forming the desire in my heart for something similar to take place in Italy. In this way, during the spring of 2011 we organized a first march for life that took place in the “lago di Garda”, with the participation of around 800 people.

Enthusiasm grew and, thus, on May 13, 2012 we organized a second march for life in Rome with around 15, 000 people participating, with the support of over 40 bishops from Italy and Europe. Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke honored us with his presence for the entire duration of the march: from the Coliseum to Castel S. Angelo.

This year was an even greater success: there were an estimated 40,000 present from all over the world, among which were the President of the March for Life in the USA, Jeanne Monahan; Lila Rose, president of Live Action; Geoffrey Strickland representing Priests for Life and many others like Dr. Dor, president of SOS-tout-petits, leader of the pro life movement in France. The greatest surprise, however, was the presence of the Holy Father, who graciously came out into the crowds to give us his blessing.

The echo stemming from this throughout the international media outlets was enormous.

But now we are already turning our attention to next year’s March that will take place on May 4, 2014. We ask, even now, for your help so as to make it an even greater success and of course you are all mostly welcome. The March for Life here is not properly a prolife movement as such: it is an event in which diverse groups come together united in the same desire to defend life. However the March for Life is also something more than an event because it is the affirmation of a principle. What truly matters is not so much the number of

the participants or the quality of the organization, but the Truth of the principles that we desire to defend. We live in a very fluid society today in which everything can transform and change, with nothing being permanent. Above all, everything can be bought and sold: but we know that not everything can be negotiated. Principles exist which are absolute and true – Why then do we say, for example, that life is a non negotiable value? It is because life is the first of all rights, and without the right to life no other right could exist. Certainly it is not the most important right, because we know that the human person is both body and soul, and the life of the soul is superior to that of the body. However, if we do not sustain a right to life there cannot exist any other type of right. In this way, the values of the family and of education are manifest as they are bases from which one can discover the life of grace and thus attain our final end, which is Eternal Life.

I have spoken of the life of grace. I should have maybe addressed this earlier since among the fundamental reasons for the prolife movement's development is this one: the action of divine Grace that touches our hearts, enlightens our minds, drives action. It does not depend on us, but demands our cooperation; and when one cooperates with Grace, one is capable of extraordinary feats. The history of sainthood teaches you that.

### **A Profound Societal Wound**

Someone could think that history does not turn back, that the so-called “civil rights”, such as abortion and “homosexual marriage”, are irreversible. This is not so. Abortion is a wound that does not easily close and heal: just as the wound remains in the woman so it also remains in society. It is a problem that, with the passing of time, intensifies because abortion has never been truly accepted by society – not in Italy nor in any other country. As one can see in countries like America in which abortion has older roots, the passing of time yields an increasingly stronger and more determined reaction. Abortion remains an open wound, in America, in England, in France, and also in Italy: it is an ever increasingly profound wound to society and thus it is ours to nourish and guide the reactionary movements against it: that which is contrary to nature must be combated.

We know that a society founded upon rights which are not natural has no future. A people that kills its children does not have a future (it suffices here to think of the birth rate in Italy which is below replacement level).

If an innocent human being has the right to live there is no law that has the authority to erase an indefensible human life. We then do not want to limit ourselves to proclaim a human right to life. We want to also protest against immoral legislation that sanctifies, under the name of abortion, or more vaguely still “interruption of pregnancy”, the right to kill the innocent.

This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Constantine that after three centuries of persecution gave peace and freedom to the Church ushering in Christian civilization.

Our opponents would like to take up the public arena with their laws, confining Christians to the catacombs once again. We must react asserting the rights of the Truth and the Good not only within our consciences, but also in the public arena.

Mgr Crepaldi, Archbishop of Trieste, in the north of Italy, said the day before the March: *"If the Catholic faith has no public dimension, then there is no Catholic faith. As we can observe, inasmuch as reason become progressively a private matter so faith too becomes*

*a private matter. If the believer has to renounce the reasons for his own faith as soon as he enters the public domain, then he ends up thinking that his own faith has no reason at all".*

We will never accept the legalization of murder and we want our protest to be public and collective, being the protest of a people that comes together and marches to raise their own voices in the name of those who cannot speak for themselves, cannot defend themselves, in the name of the millions of victims of this holocaust.

The experience of coming together in protest will also help us when we must confront present and future efforts to legalize homosexual "marriage", or euthanasia, or other aberrations that will be proposed. You see the great example that gives us France in these last months. We can not accept "homosexual wedding, adoption, union because Homosexual union is an act against natural law: both in the biological and moral spheres. It has no future: it carries within it the seeds of its own self-destruction.

### **Conclusion**

To defend these values - to defend life - a great strength is required from us and a great battle awaits us, as we must at times come to the defense of our ideals even amongst our own family, friends, colleagues (to them the world has changed and it is us who must change and accustom ourselves to it), and certainly against a public opinion (for example Radical feminists, etc) that would like to cast us back into the catacombs. We know thus, as Catholics, why Jesus himself told us: "If the world hates you it is because it first hated me."

If providence has allowed us to be born during this period of history it then means that this is the society in which we must both act and react.

We must then fight and know, from the teaching and example that comes to us from the saints, that life is a struggle and if we want to attain victory we must fight because there cannot be victory without struggle. We see this dynamic in sports: the one who wants to win must intensely prepare and seriously commit themselves towards this end. It is, however, the same regarding our own lives: if we want to conquer sin we must commit ourselves to the struggle for victory.

Today, we here present, are people who live in the world and thus the world is our principal place of battle. Our principal enemy is relativism that would have us construct a society hostile towards God. We must not, however, fall prey to fear or cease our efforts because of the actions of those who rely upon tactics such as ridicule, intimidation, and other deplorable methods to have us take a step back, to convince us that the battle in the public sphere is one that is lost for us. In a certain sense, humanly speaking, they would be right (at least according to the Mass Media).

We know that our role though, as *miles Christi*, is that of fighting to defend the values in which we believe. The victory will be given from on high and because of this, it is of fundamental importance that we unite to our action a spirit of prayer: we must invoke the Holy Spirit to grant us his gifts and, principally, that of strength. Also, we must have great devotion to the angels, those to whom God has entrusted us for our daily protection. Of course we have the Most Holy Virgin as a point of reference, guide, and comfort, she whom we invoke under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*, Help of Christians.

God never abandons those who give themselves to Him and go to battle for Him: we have seen this in the great historic military battles in which all seemed lost: Covadonga (722), Lepanto (1571), Vienna (1683). This is our duty: to defend the rights of God regarding each single soul and society. The victory will be His to attain, according to His own timing and not

according to ours. Take courage, and now, we march forward, united in prayerful action, from Italy to America.

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