

Let Us Love One Another

By Bishop Richard G. Lennon

No dispute: Human life begins at conception

On Sunday, August 24, Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the House of Representatives was interviewed on a national news program. During the course of the conversation the host asked Speaker Pelosi "When does life begin?" In response she said "We don't know". Further, referring to herself as a Catholic, she indicated that this issue has been an issue of controversy in the Church, implying it still is such.

As one might well expect there have been rather strong reactions to her responses from people in the pew and to Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop William Lori, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and from many, many more. All with good reason.

The *Catechism Of The Catholic Church*, issued as an authoritative source of Catholic Church teaching by our late Holy Father John Paul II, addresses this matter directly. The *Catechism* was published, described in the words of John Paul II, "as a full, complete exposition of Catholic doctrine, enabling everyone to know what the Church professes, celebrates, lives, and prays in her daily life." (Apostolic Letter *Laetamur Magnopere*)

In response to the question "When does life begin?" the *Catechism* states "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence,



a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.”(CCC, paragraph #2270) Further, in the very next paragraph the *Catechism* states “since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable.”

In light of these clear unambiguous statements from the *Catechism Of The Catholic Church* it is hard to imagine any other response from a Catholic than that presented in the *Catechism*.

This unfortunate conversation, and in particular the response to the question, however provides all of us the opportunity to pause and reflect upon the subject of Church teaching in our own personal lives. We all know how easy it is to identify something as incomplete or wrong in the life or response of another person, while not seeing the same in ourselves. And yet I dare say that on a regular basis we all need to check ourselves to make sure that the people we profess to be, that is Catholics, are in fact the people we are, living out our daily lives faithfully in accordance with God and His holy Church.

God’s teachings are not always easy nor popular to embrace. From the earliest days of the Church, the testimony overwhelmingly documents the struggles people have experienced in being true to God’s teachings in their lives. Sometimes the troubles came from within a person, as when a person does not wish to give up one’s way of living in favor of

living in harmony with God's teaching and that of His Church. Other times troubles came from outside a person, for example from society, whereby a person is encouraged if not pressured to fall in line with the current moment which in fact is contrary to the ways of God.

And yet, being a believer in God, being a person of faith, calls for a response of faithfulness, or better fidelity to God and His teaching. Certainly lives of prayer and generous outreach to those in need contribute to and strengthen one's relationship with God. However, these activities are not sufficient by themselves. We must know God and His teachings and live by them accordingly. There is no substitute for this aspect of fidelity to God's teaching in our Catholic way of life.

The demand to know God and His teachings challenges all of us to a life long commitment. Nothing less than that suffices. What we say and do does matter! For our saying and doing to be positive there needs to be a solid, reliable foundation from which they may flow, and then in the words of Scripture our saying and doing will "bear much fruit".

As adults we need to nourish and develop our relationship with God and so take responsibility for our knowing God and His teachings. The television interview I referenced above should be an opportunity for all of us to re-commit ourselves to knowing God and His teachings lest in reality, almost unbeknownst to us, we be drifting away from God by living contrary to His teachings.

May I recommend to all the *Catechism Of The Catholic Church* as a reliable source. Do not be frightened by its size. Remember it is presenting God to us, Whom we profess to love and desire to be with forever. If I may offer a suggestion it would be to read Part IV first, which is on the Prayer Life – it is a fine reflection on prayer as our way to union with God.

My hope, needless to say, is that all will grow in their knowledge and love of God and of His teachings. Likewise, I hope that we as a Catholic community might all live those teachings in integrity and happiness. In that way, as Catholics engaged in the world, none of us would give an answer like the one we witnessed on that national news program or anywhere for that matter to the simple question “when does life begin?”

(This column originally appeared in the Friday, September 5, 2008 issue of the Catholic Universe Bulletin, the official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.)