

Mons Vincenzo Paglia
Homily during the Holy Mass with Priests for Life
Rome, June 14th 2013

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, I welcome all of you here to Rome on the beautiful occasion of the *Priests for Life* pilgrimage in honor of the Gospel of Life.

You have come, during this Year of Faith, to affirm a "Yes" to Jesus Christ, as well as to embrace fully the gift of human life, that is made in the "image and likeness of God" and redeemed by Christ with dignity so exalted, that it is destined for eternal life through participation in none other than the life of the Triune God.

Saint Paul tells us in the first reading today something about this "Yes." It brings suffering and persecution. It is a "Yes" that is often opposed and that many do not want you to say, precisely because it will upset those who are saying "No". Yet our faith assures us that this never means that our message of life falls on deaf ears, nor less still, that we are abandoned or destroyed.

Why not?

St Paul, Martyr of Rome, said: the suffering we carry is "the dying of Jesus." In the great paradox of our Faith, we therefore, believe that in enduring persecution we become united with Christ on the cross to gain life eternal.

Jesus Christ is Life. To stand with him is to stand with life, to be Pro-life, that is, to possess a *spirituality* in favor of life that is integral to the Christian Gospel. And the work of announcing and applying that Gospel to the concrete circumstances of our world, is deeply rooted in the commitment we already have as disciples of Christ. Last Sunday the Gospel of Luke reminded us of this in recounting the resurrection of the widows young son. The Lord gave him life back and in doing so, he also gave new life to the woman, who began anew her life as a mother. This is meaningful for us too. What does it mean to give new life to our modern world? What does it mean to work to help women and men become mothers and fathers again, in a world that often refuses maternity and paternity?

In this context, and in the setting of this Eucharist, "This is My Body -- given up for you", we see how Jesus does not keep His body at the expense of others; He gives it away so that others may live! Therefore, as Christians, we too, do the same: giving ourselves for one another in the beautiful Eucharistic hymn of life, "This is my body". Our self-giving at every moment and circumstance of our daily lives therefore, restores this world and its culture to the Gospel of Life.

If we look at marriage, for example, we see how husband and wife say these life-giving words to one-another: this is my life, given to you! Indeed, the bond of their love, their total gift of self, represents the love between Christ and His Church. And just as the union between Christ and the Church cannot be broken, so too, the marriage of one man and one woman was instituted by God in such unity of persons that it remain unbreakable, indissoluble. On the other hand we have to be sincere: how far is our human, daily, weekly love from God's love! He told us: "Love one another as I loved you!". If we look into our "love" we find selfishness, pride, violence, lack of respect, and possessive feelings.... We actually need to learn from the school of Jesus' love. This self-giving, is something which each of one of us can learn and do, in a similar fashion to

spouses, for the life of the other. For this reason, all we do for the unborn child, for the poor, the sick, the elderly, for the dying, becomes a powerful witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: "this is my body given up for you."

Do not be afraid therefore, my brothers and sisters, to give yourself on behalf of the lives of others! Do not be afraid of sacrifice for the weakest and most vulnerable among us! Do not be afraid when others do not appreciate the work you do for the defense of life! God sees you, and the weakest of the weak wait for your help! Do not be afraid, for all this is integral to the Gospel and proof that you are imitating Christ, doing His will; proof that God is on your side.

You have come to Rome, for a weekend of prayer, witness, and education based in particular on the great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. In that document, Blessed John Paul II said "Where life is involved, the service of charity [of self-giving] must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good" (EV, n.87). It is precisely that consistency that calls for a new Culture of Life, in which the unborn child, for example, is treated with the same care and protection as the born. The consistent ethic of life, properly understood, recognizes life itself is the condition for all the rest.

"I believed; therefore I spoke", says St. Paul today, in the first reading. Within this faith setting of *self-giving charity for the other*, of particular effectiveness in building the culture of life are those who speak about the mercy and forgiveness of God after they have had abortions. "Silent no more," they remind everyone of the destructive extent of abortion for all, yet of the boundless mercy of the God of life. When those -- whether mothers or fathers -- who have participated in abortion turn to God, seek His forgiveness, find His healing, and then tell the world about it, they are awakening the consciences of those who erroneously think abortion is a solution. They are also providing hope for those who think that they cannot be forgiven. and they are pointing them to the Savior, the one to whom we say the "Yes" of faith, Jesus Christ. In a world of gloom and despair, this apostolate is indeed a beautiful component of the radiant brilliance of the Gospel of Life and its message.

Dear brothers and sisters, deepen that "Yes" in your own hearts during this pilgrimage. Believe and speak, with the conviction and integrity that today's world needs. Persevere in your commitment to the Gospel of Life with the peace and joy that come only from Jesus Christ, Amen!