

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
for the Mass of the March for Life at the
National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche, St. Augustine
January 16, 2021

The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and proclaim liberty to captives. (Luke 4: 18) It is good news that the citizens of this great nation, as members of the Body of Christ, will come all together to make a stand for the dignity of human life made in the image of God. And therefore, it is always sacred and worthy of love and respect, especially when dealing with the innocent unborn.

Since January 22, 1973, our people have grown in their awareness of the damage abortion causes in the lives of the most vulnerable creature in the womb of their mothers, but also in the devastating impact abortion has on the lives of the parents and the increase of violence in society at large.

Standing strong for human life at the very beginning and throughout all stages of development is our clear mission, inopportune times or not. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta said with such clarity, we are called to be faithful, even if our struggle does not always meet with success. We can not be discouraged by the inconsistency of our leaders who regress in their pro-life stand for merely pragmatic advantages. But as the Word of God says today to all of us, we must renew our account of our lives.

It is always good to notice tangible good tidings, despite the pandemic affecting us. All of the bishops of the country have taken the initiative with great dissemination of the program, *Walking With Moms in Need*, implemented in all the parishes of our country, seeking to serve all pregnant women and their families through the many pregnancy resource centers available today in our communities.

The Word of God today has taught us to come with confidence to our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, for he is the throne of grace, where mercy is plenty, and where all of us can find grace and timely help. The message of the new evangelization proposes conversion to the Gospel of Life, a truth of the plan of creation of our good God, for humanity, from the beginning of the human creation to its natural end.

St. John Paul II's teachings on the Gospel of Life, *Evangelium Vitae*, remain timelier than ever. The intrinsic dignity of human life is not a partisan or political matter. Pope Francis teaches a human rights issue, which needs recognition by all in society, especially the protection of the innocent unborn and the vulnerable infirmed and elderly, both at the beginning and at the end of life of the human journey. It is in this moment, the beginning and the end of human life, where advocacy is most urgently needed due to the current dictatorship of moral relativism regarding values and ethics in our society.

The Eucharist that we are celebrating here in this most sacred acre of the State of Florida, in this National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche, is a perfect setting for us to affirm the beauty of Christ in the protective care of his Mother – The Emmanuel and The Theotokos – a Christmas tender

image for all times and all seasons of the entire year. This historic icon of beauty that irradiates from ancient St. Augustine makes present today the kingdom of God, a kingdom of truth and love, justice and peace.