

**Day of Penance for Violations Committed Through Acts of Abortion
January 23, 2012**

**St. Peter's Church
Washington, D.C.**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, consecrated men and women, dear brothers and sisters:

Today we gather in the presence of the Eucharistic King, of him “who alone [has] the power to impart the breath of life” and who has “made us stewards of creation” with heavy hearts.¹ Our hearts are heavy because thirty-nine years ago the Supreme Court of the United States of America refused to protect the most innocent and vulnerable among us: the unborn.

Our hearts are heavy because we know the terrible repercussions of this decision both for individual women and men and for society at large. With the decision of Roe vs. Wade our society has lost an essential quality of an authentic civilization. Addressing the new ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See, Pope Benedict XVI recently observed:

A society is truly human when without reservations it protects and respects the dignity of every person from conception until

the moment of his or her natural death. However, should it decide to 'get rid' of its members in the greatest need of protection, exclude people from being people, it would be behaving in a profoundly inhuman and also distorted manner with regard to the equality – obvious to every person of good will – of the dignity of all people, in all the stages of life.²

We are here, dear brothers and sisters, not to “impose faith indirectly on others but rather to defend values that are fundamentally comprehensible to all as truths of existence, even if interests of another kind seek in various ways to obscure this consideration.”³

Yes, our hearts are heavy, but we are not without hope because this past Friday – January 13th – it was announced that the Northern Illinois Women’s Center in Rockford, Illinois closed its doors for good. As a result of numerous violations of unsanitary conditions, the Illinois Department of Public Health suspended the license of the Clinic this past September. After a judge in early January agreed the Center could resume its operations, the staff found little support in the community and so – thanks be to God! - the doors have now closed.

To be sure, many other such doors must also be closed, particularly in our Diocese in Granite City, but this is a step in the right direction and there is in this a lesson to be learned. Even in Granite City there are reasons for hope. In the year 2000, the so-called Hope Clinic for Women performed 13,104 abortions; in 2011, it performed 3,500 abortions.

It seems difficult to imagine, but even today, many people who support the so-called right of a woman to “abort” her baby do not actually know how a baby is “aborted.” They do not know of the dangers – both physical and psychological – that are inherent in such a vile act. Before the suspension of the license of the Northern Illinois Women’s Center enough of the community of the environs of Rockford supported the abortuary; once the facts were made known, the community would no longer support it.

The prayers and sacrifices of so many people of good will who daily defend life and seek to truly help pregnant mothers have now at last been fulfilled. For almost forty years they struggled, spoke, and prayed planting seeds here and there that now have come to fruition. In this is our lesson; we cannot lose hope but must always stand with and for the Truth, which is Jesus Christ!

My dear young friends, gathered in such large numbers to give witness to the dignity of every human life, I now turn to you, as your Bishop and father in Christ, and I say to you: Do not be afraid to speak the truth, and to speak it in love! Your presence here lifts our heavy hearts and fills us with unspeakable gratitude to God.

You have been created by God to love and to be loved, this you know. It is what has brought you here, and so has your conviction that the unborn children whose lives have been or will be taken from them have also been created by God to love and to be loved.

If you speak the truth of abortion kindly and gently, despite your youth, people will listen. What will matter and change hearts will be the genuineness of your convictions and the sincere witness of your lives lived in fidelity to Christ Jesus. You can become, small as you are, great instruments in the hand of God. Yes, you can become “visible instruments of his love in a world that still profoundly yearns for that love amid the poverty, loneliness, marginalization and ignorance that we see all around us.”⁴ The world needs this witness of the love of God and the truth of our existence, it needs *your* witness.

Brothers and sisters, there may be a few people today who will tell us we should not be here in Washington, D.C. proclaiming the dignity of all human life. They are wrong; by virtue of our faith we must be here because our “role as Christians is to take an active part in the life of society, seeking to make it ever more humane, ever more marked by authentic freedom, justice and solidarity.”⁵ I thank you, dear faithful of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois and those who have joined with us this morning, for your great witness to life! I thank you for the many prayers, good works, and sacrifices you have made for the cause of life!

Together, then, encouraged by each other’s witness and strengthened with the Eucharist who lifts our heavy hearts, let us go forth through the streets of our nation’s capital and through every street giving witness to the beauty and inherent dignity of every human life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Roman Missal*, Collect for the Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See*, November 7, 2011.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Volunteers*, November 11, 2011.

⁵ *Ibid.*