

**Homily for the Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life
March 21, 2023**

**Sangamon Auditorium
University of Illinois at Springfield
Springfield, Illinois**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield here in our Illinois State Capital, I welcome all of you to this Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life, which we celebrate prior to our March for Life this afternoon.

I welcome Bishop Michael McGovern and all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Diocese of Belleville.

I welcome Bishop Louis Tylka and all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Diocese of Peoria.

I welcome Bishop Ronald Hicks and all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Diocese of Joliet.

I welcome Bishop Joy Alappatt and all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas.

I welcome Bishop Mark Bartosic and all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Archdiocese of Chicago.

I also welcome all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from the Diocese of Rockford.

Of course, I welcome all the priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay Christian faithful from our own Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

We have gathered here from all across the Land of Lincoln because the lives of unborn babies in our State of Illinois are threatened as never before. Since the United States Supreme Court decision last year in *Dobbs v. Jackson* overturned the 1973 decision of *Roe v. Wade* and rightfully returned the question of the legality of abortion back to the states, large states such as Illinois, California, and New York have unabashedly sought to make these states abortion-friendly havens. In states such as ours, we cannot relax our pro-life efforts now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned. On the contrary, we must step up our struggles to counter the evil forces of death.

Today was intentionally chosen for the Illinois March for Life not only because it is a day when the Illinois General Assembly is in session, but also because of its proximity to the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, which the Church normally celebrates on March 25. This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to announce that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceived Jesus in her womb and became the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God became incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, the feast of the Annunciation has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend all human life. Scientific advances such as ultrasound imaging have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In order to care for, protect, and welcome new life in the womb, we must first care for, support, welcome, and serve pregnant women, especially those facing difficulties or challenging circumstances. All

mothers, like Our Blessed Mother, bear the miracle of new life into the world. In a special way, they are entrusted by God with the gift of life. It is the role of the Church to walk with all mothers, offering support, encouragement, and assistance as they seek to answer God's call in their lives.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation also coincides with the anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, known in English as *The Gospel of Life*. This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life.

In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II challenged us to assess our efforts in assisting pregnant moms in need and to improve our responses, where needed, especially at the local level. In short, we are truly called to accompany each pregnant and parenting woman in need. He wrote:

With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread the culture of life is today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination, we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth (*Evangelium vitae* 95).

In 2020, on the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae – The Gospel of Life*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops launched a nationwide effort entitled, “Walking with Moms in Need,” and invited parishes across the country to join them. Parishes are asked to undertake a yearlong process to walk in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need and prayerfully consider how we can increase our outreach to mothers. Parishes should also inventory what pregnancy resources are available in their local areas, identify gaps, and make and implement plans to better serve pregnant women in our local communities.

When the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary, she was troubled and confused at the unexpected news, yet faithfully embraced God’s plan for her life. As a young, pregnant woman, Mary would face many challenges. Today, mothers facing an unexpected pregnancy may have trouble recognizing the great gift that God has given them. Concerns about a lack of material and financial resources, as well as physical and emotional support systems often crowd their minds and their hearts. Fear and anxiety can push women to believe that abortion is their only option. As Catholics, we know that abortion is never the answer for a woman in need. During challenging periods in our lives, we all need the care and support of others.

For a pregnant woman in need, the real, tangible support of others can allow her to see a way forward. Knowing she is not alone can allow her to open her heart to God's plan and choose life.

I encourage all of you to embark on this journey, which is so urgently needed for the lives of unborn babies, the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of their mothers and fathers, and for the benefit of our entire community. We ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we discern how together we can build a culture of life by better supporting those who bear the gift of life to the world.

Relying on our own human resources, our efforts are limited, but Mary's response to the angel reminds us that, "nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:37). So, we turn now to her Son, who comes to us in this Eucharist.

May God give us this grace. Amen.