

**Homily for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle B
September 15, 2024**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

For the past few years, I have been attending the Napa Institute's summer conference in July, which brings together about 700 to 800 people for seminars and presentations on various topics affecting Catholics in our world today.

Three years ago at the Napa Institute's summer conference, I met Jonathan Roumie, the actor who plays the part of Jesus in the television series, "The Chosen." He was part of a panel discussion of actors and others in the entertainment world. The moderator of the panel started out by introducing each member of the panel. When he got to Jonathan Roumie, the moderator pretended that he did not know who Mr. Roumie was and asked him, "Sir, what is your name?" Mr. Roumie put on his best Jesus voice and replied, "Well who do you say that I am?"

Of course, the audience laughed, as you just did, because we are so familiar with that question that Jesus asked Peter, as we just heard in today's Gospel from Saint Mark (Mk 8:27-35). The answer that Peter gave, "You are the Christ," is the answer that all of us who profess to be Christians must give to Our Lord, who asks each one of us that question.

The fact that Christians recognize Jesus as the Christ, that is, the Messiah who is the Lord of our lives, is the reason why we are pro-life. God is the Creator, the Source of all life and the Master of all life.

Yesterday we observed the National Day of Remembrance For Aborted Children with a prayer service at the Springfield Right To Life building on Bruns Lane, next door to Planned Parenthood. In my remarks following the opening prayer, I noted that the unborn children that are most forgotten are the frozen embryonic children that remain in storage as part of the process of *in vitro* fertilization.

This is important for us to understand properly because many people who consider themselves to be pro-life mistakenly support *in vitro* fertilization as a pro-family technique to help couples who are struggling with infertility to have children.

Pro-life advocates are misguided who think that all means of bringing children into the world are good and should be fostered. There is a natural empathy for infertile couples who desperately want to have children. They wonder why the Catholic Church would not support *in vitro* fertilization as a way to help these infertile couples to have children and start a family. Yes, the Catholic Church does want to help such couples, but the means to do so must be morally licit, such as adoption, since the end does not justify the means.

First, it might be helpful to make sure there is clarity about terminology. The phrase "*in vitro*" is Latin for "in glass." It refers to a glass laboratory dish or test tube used by scientists and doctors. The phrase is contrasted with *in vivo*, which means, "in a live person," or *in utero*, which means "in the uterus or womb" of the woman. IVF is a procedure whereby babies are conceived in laboratory dish. A fertilized embryo – or sometimes more than one embryo – is then transferred to the woman's uterus.

The problems with *in vitro* fertilization were explained in a [statement](#) issued on March 8, 2024, by Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, who serves as Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Pro-Life Activities, in which he

said, “Children have a right to be born to their married mother and father, through a personal act of self-giving love. IVF, however well-intended, breaches this bond and these rights and, instead, treats human beings like products or property. This is all the more true in situations involving anonymous donors or surrogacy. This of course does not mean that our brothers and sisters who were conceived by IVF are somehow ‘less than’ anyone else. Every person has immeasurable value regardless of how he or she was conceived – and that applies, absolutely, to all children created through IVF, the majority of whom have not been and may never be born. The fact is that, in the IVF industry, many embryos are never transferred to a mother’s womb, but are destroyed or indefinitely frozen, and, of those who are transferred, only a fraction survive to be eventually born. All told, there are millions of human beings who have been killed or potentially permanently frozen by this industry. This cannot be the answer to the very real cross of fertility challenges. In efforts to bring about new life, we cannot turn our face from the many more lives that are cut short and extinguished in the process.”

By producing human embryos outside the womb, IVF clinics expose them to various forms of manipulation, including the risk that they will be

“mixed up” between families without parents’ knowledge or consent. This has led to scandals, aggrieved parents, and lawsuits.

I am aware that there are couples who have had a child by IVF, not knowing that there are grave moral objections to *in vitro* fertilization. The Catholic Church teaches that a person is not morally culpable of sin if he or she is not aware that a certain action is sinful. That is why it is important for us to be well-informed about this very important issue that affects so many people.

In 1987, just a few years after *in vitro* fertilization was introduced, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would later become Pope Benedict XVI, wrote an [*Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day*](#) in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which he said, “The law cannot tolerate - indeed it must expressly forbid - that human beings, even at the embryonic stage, should be treated as objects of experimentation, be mutilated or destroyed with the excuse that they are superfluous or incapable of developing normally. . . . It is part of the duty of the public authority to ensure that the civil law is regulated according to the

fundamental norms of the moral law in matters concerning human rights, human life and the institution of the family.”

All public authorities would do well to heed the wisdom contained in this instruction, which is still very pertinent today. We who are pro-life say that all human life must be respected and protected from conception to natural death. That includes embryonic children created as part of the process of *in vitro* fertilization. We pray that people will gain a better understanding of what *in vitro* fertilization is really all about and act accordingly to respect embryonic children as real human beings.

May God give us this grace. Amen.