

Bishop McElroy's Homily at the Mass for the Protection of the Unborn

January 16th, 2021

Immaculata Parish

In the Gospel of Luke today, we hear what is the response of the Blessed Mother to that tremendous, magnificent, traumatic, and jarring moment of the Annunciation when she understands that she is to become the Mother of God and that through God's coming into the world, the whole of humanity will be redeemed. In this passage, we see the three elements of Mary's response, having had little time to absorb what is happening to her. We hear the Gospel so often that we take for granted Mary's response, but think for a minute if you were she. If you were from a small town in a far-off region in a remote place and suddenly, you understand you are to be the Mother of God. The whole of her life, everything she had planned to get married and have a quiet life in the village with her family and friends, is overturned. Yet, she accepts that in her fidelity to God.

In the Gospel today, we see the three-fold response of Mary to this news. The first element is that she understands that in the moment of the Annunciation and the Incarnation, there is a human life in her womb, where God and humanity are joined together in her womb and in humanity. She understands that this is a child from the first moment and lives that way. All that she has in life is transformed by that reality. She doesn't look at it as a speculative thing or a "maybe". She understands that God has given her a life within her womb that is already there; that is already human, and in her case, is already divine. That is the first element to Mary's response: the immediate understanding that from the moment of conception, human life is within the womb and there's sacredness in that. Mary understands that and attests to that reality immediately.

The second element of the Gospel in Mary's response is that she goes to Elizabeth. Now, I don't know about you, but if I were Mary, having all this turbulence injected into my life, I would not be thinking of somebody else. I would not be journeying to another town to help them out. I would be dealing with my own issues with this, but Mary does not. She goes to Elizabeth, her kinswoman, who is older and thus is likely to have a difficult pregnancy. In fact, she was of such a difficult age that it was thought to be an impossible pregnancy. Mary goes to her and she reaches out and helps her and stays with her. That's an important theme that we are celebrating today: to reach out to pregnant women who are in need.

Finally, Mary in the Gospel witnesses to the justice, mercy, and life of God which God calls all of us to. In the Magnificat, that beautiful hymn, Mary proclaims from her heart that she understands this is a human life, and in her case, is God also. She reaches out to Elizabeth, but more importantly, she proclaims publicly in the Magnificat the vision of the God of justice, peace, and life. We, today, in gathering for this Mass and this Walk for Life, are echoing Mary's three actions.

First of all, in our own life and understanding, we constantly witness to the reality that human life begins at conception. That it is humanity within the womb that needs protection, that it is sacred and that we must always regard human life as sacred in the womb. It is a wonderful, though arduous, responsibility and vocation of mothers with children in the womb to give them health, to bear them, to nurture them, and to help them through.

The second thing we are doing today is a particular theme for today's march and last year's march, which is to witness to the need of pregnant women in distress. Being pro-life means safeguarding the

child in the womb and safeguarding the mother who is carrying the child and bringing that girl or boy into the world. As we gather here, we are gathering as a community that asserts that we will reach out, nurture and help pregnant women who are in need. That's a wonderful part of the pro-life movement that has been accentuated in recent years.

The third thing that we are doing is witnessing as Mary witnessed in the Magnificat. We are witnessing to our society and to the world the importance of protecting unborn children in the womb through laws, through regulations which prohibit abortion and the taking of innocent life, and through policies which help support women who are pregnant and getting them nurturing medical care afterwards.

In a very real way, today there is a sadness to how we witness. Because of COVID, we are unable to have the walk, which I always look forward to. The National March for Life was also called off because of COVID. We wanted to have the caravan, and because of other demonstrations going on in the County Administration area, we decided to postpone that, and I think it'll gain public witness at the end of the month. But, our witness is not merely a walk and not primarily a caravan. Our witness is a continuing call to us during the year in our conversations, in our work as citizens and believers, and in our social and family relationships. Our witness is primarily to point to the need of protecting human life and unborn children, and to speak of them with reverence. We must understand that they are as human as we are. That witness each year is not a one-day witness. The walk is a wonderful thing, but that is not the real witness of the Diocese of San Diego to the proclamation of the protection of unborn children in our midst, in our society, and in our laws. That witness needs to be 365 days a year in how we speak about human life kindly and in dialogue with others, even with those who disagree. It is about how we bring a witness of what we know to be true that the child in the womb is sacred, as sacred as our lives.

We must continually witness to that in the way that Mary did in the Gospel today. The Magnificat is a prayer of praise to the justice of God. We pray and witness also to the justice of God; how it is alive in our midst and how it needs to be attained in a much fuller degree, particularly as we look upon the child in the womb and the little children that are here today. We understand that we have a responsibility that is moral and spiritual and that calls us to speak, to witness, and to act.