

Bishop's Homily
VIGIL for the UNBORN
Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament
November 27, 2010

There is a commercial on television that asks for donations to Saint Jude's Hospital for children. Saint Jude's is a very worth-while cause. But, the commercial causes me a great deal of sadness. The pleading for funds is underscored by someone saying something to the effect that no child should be allowed to die at the very beginning of its life.

How true that is! Who could argue with a statement like that? And, yet, - in practice, our society condones a practice that is just the opposite of that. If there is any child that is just beginning its life, it is the one about to be born, - about to start on an incredible journey, experiencing God's wonderful gift of existence.

Not only are multitudes of these children allowed to die, - they are deliberately killed. It is called a "right," and the law of this land, known as the land of opportunity, protects such killing from prosecution.

We call it an abortion, - a procedure, - the right of choice, - or whatever. We use such terminology so that it won't offend our conscience as much as it would if we called it what in reality it truly is.

No matter what we call it, - in simple and unadulterated terms, - it is the killing of a child.

Our Holy Father has asked that, in all the Catholic churches throughout the world today, there be a vigil celebrated for unborn children. For this moment of prayer, Pope Benedict XVI chose today because it is the eve of a new Church Year, - for we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent. Also, it is a time of preparation for Christmas, - when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is a time when we give and receive gifts to enhance our lives.

I quote from the Holy Father's statement, "The time of preparation for Holy Christmas is a propitious moment to invoke divine protection for every human being called into existence, and also for a thanksgiving to God for the gift of life received from our parents."

Certainly, we can pray for a change in our civil laws. We ought to pray for those whose lives are terminated not long after they barely begin. We should pray for those affected by the taking of a child's life, - including the mothers who feel that doing so is the right choice. All this, the Holy Father asks us to do this evening.

However and above all, we need to pray that hearts will be changed.

Another TV commercial begins with a young man becoming the president of the United States. Then, the ad takes you back to when he graduated from college, when he was born, when his parents were married, - and, finally, when his parents met. It was in a subway. As the young man was waiting for the train that would take him to the airport, he saw through the window of the train that had just pulled in a young lady. Smitten by her looks, he quickly took out his I-Phone, changed his flight reservation, and got on the train in which the girl sat. That's how they met, and everything else followed; - the inference being that, if it hadn't been for the I-Phone, all this never would have happened, - and, the young man who became president would not have been. It all began with his father making a choice at the subway station.

I like that commercial because it illustrates a fundamental fact. Our actions affect the future, - a future that is unknown to us. Somehow, our choices work into God's providence for humanity. They can, also, frustrate his overall plan.

Aborting (that is, killing) an unborn child is one of those choices. I do not think that it is too far-fetched to say that, perhaps, the world is in the state in which it finds itself because those who could have provided solutions were not allowed to live.

And, who knows, - perhaps, you and I will live to see an individual whose leadership will be instrumental in making this world a better place in which to live. It will be the result of two people meeting, getting married, conceiving a child, and making the choice (perhaps, a difficult one) to allow that child to live and grow up, regardless of the sacrifices involved. That is how futures begin.

This evening, we enter into the Holy Season of Advent. It is a season when we celebrate the beginning of our salvation. Actually, the season holds the promise of a new beginning, - as we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Christ into our world. If it were not for the moment when Mary made the choice to say "yes" to the Archangel Gabriel, this cathedral would not be standing as a beacon in Altoona and you and I would not be here right now.

Our lives are an extension of the Advent Season, as a season of promise. While we wait and when we live, we have an opportunity to change the future. What a tremendous gift life is, - the God-given gift of coming into being and existing so that, through us, the Lord can forge the wonderful future that He desires for us.

How is it possible for someone to take away arbitrarily such a gift from another human being?

Joined with Catholic Christians throughout the world, we continue our vigilant prayer for unborn children. May the beginning of their existence be preserved and nurtured. May it be a celebration of a new beginning for us, for our society, and for our nation.

The future of unborn children is in our hands. And, perhaps, our future is in theirs.