

**Homily by Bishop Jaime Soto for the Mass of Reparation/Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, Jan. 23, 2017**

They had said, “He has an unclean spirit.” (Mk. 3.22-30) Today’s gospel passage comes after a series of episodes of Jesus preaching, healing, and casting out demons. It was because of all these powerful works of mercy that the scribes came out from Jerusalem to criticize what Jesus was doing. They feared him and believed he was possessed by a devil. Jesus suffered from such misunderstanding throughout his ministry. Even many of his own disciples would fail to understand his mission.

We know that Jesus was possessed only by the Holy Spirit of His heavenly Father. His works of mercy were inspired and energized by the Holy Spirit. The spirit of Jesus gave hope, gave healing, and gave freedom to all those who were worried, wounded, and held bound by evil. He gave this spirit to his disciples and commanded them to do the same: give hope, bring healing, and free those bound by fear.

This past Saturday, Catholics and other people of good will gathered in San Francisco for the Walk for Life. There were tens of thousands gathered. One secular media source reported that the Walk stretched for almost two miles along Market Street. The gathering was more culturally and racially diverse than most of the other marches that day. There was a strong youthful presence

among the crowd. While other events waved signs calling for the inclusion of all, the Walk for Life walked the talk about inclusion because together we marched so that all unborn children might be accorded life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We joined together in the hope that women may choose the fullness of life for their children as well as themselves.

Some voices claim that ours is an unclean spirit, a demon dooming the future of women. We should not let such fearful taunts threaten us from the mission to give hope, bring healing, and free those bound by fear. Abortion is often an act of desperation driven by fear. Bound by fear, women fall into committing an act of exclusion. Often they are persuaded, pressured and even coerced. By all this they are betrayed. What is presumed to be an act of freedom wounds them by excluding the purpose for which our freedom was given by God. The highest ambition of freedom is love and to deny the opportunity to love, even when it seems inconvenient, diminishes the human spirit. One's right to life no matter how insignificant that life may seem should not be determined or conditioned by another's choice or judgment. Yet this has become the pattern of a culture of exclusion in a throw-away society lamented by our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

We too should be wary of falling into the same pattern. The fullness of life to which we are called by Jesus means the inclusion of

all. This is the meaning of God's mercy and we should be the messengers of this mercy to all people, especially women who have been wounded by abortion or those who may be lured by the false illusions of freedom. We should be mindful of those whose lives are already burdened by abuse, poverty, and social degradation. Many of them already feel excluded and bounded by fear. When facing an unexpected pregnancy, they fall into the pattern under which they themselves are victimized. Hurt people, hurt people. So goes the sad adage. This is why, during the jubilee year of mercy, Pope Francis challenged us to be an oasis of mercy especially for those whom society has excluded.

We should be particularly careful of language. The contemporary lexicon of public discourse today tends to criticize, demonize, ostracized, marginalize whole groups of people: immigrants, African-Americans, Muslims, police, women, and Christians. We cannot build a culture of life around exclusion. By the very nature of the Spirit who has given us life we must strive to speak with reverence for each person. Inclusion is our word. This is the reason for which we were created. We must strive to build that sanctuary where we can reverence one another and worship the one heavenly Father who has made us His daughters and sons, brothers and sisters in Christ.

