

**HOMILY FOR MASS FOR THE REPARATION
OF SINS ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE**
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Several newspapers this past week reported the findings indicating a decrease in the total number of abortions to its lowest level since 1974. In another unrelated story, were reported the findings that births are at their highest level since 1961. Even with this note of assumed progress, it is still sobering to recognize that one in five pregnancies still ends in abortion.

There may be speculation about the accuracy of these numbers as well as the presumed agendas of those publishing these findings. California state agencies, for example, still do not collect abortion data.

What is clear for us on this occasion is not the accuracy of these reported trends but the continuing critical saga of American life and culture over this fundamental question of life and death. Thirty-five years after the dark day of the Supreme Court's decision to legalize the taking of an innocent life, the moral and social turmoil continues in the hearts and homes of Americans. What the Court sought to hush and muffle with a contrived notion of "privacy" continues to spill out into the streets and public squares of our communities. The cry of Abel resonates in the anguish, sorrow, and shame that will let neither our souls nor the soul of America rest.

For this reason, we come to this place, this sacred space, and stand before the altar of sacrifice to repeat the words of the prophet Joel in the first reading today: "Blow the trumpet in Zion (and in California)! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people ... Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, and say, 'Spare, O LORD, your people'."

The words of the prophet still beckon us: “Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD your God.”

“Return to the Lord your God,” urges the prophet. The psalmist asks the question for us, “How can I make a return to the Lord?” Paul suggests to us this morning: “Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.” The eloquence of the great apostle challenges the often bitter reluctance to exercise such Christian forbearance in the face of the callous, routine horror that suffocates the lives of both women and children. Yet those of you who have saved the lives of both mother and child know that the “heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” of which Paul speaks does save the life and soothe the soul. Life is rescued by love.

Our observance today marked by prayer, fasting, and works of justice and charity signals our determination to love as Christ loved us, to suffer with the anguish mother for whom there is no choice but only the desperation provoked by a society that prefers not to be bothered by her plight. A juridical and political fiat has deemed her pain “private” absolving society of any obligation.

We stand in solidarity with these women and their children precisely because the decision is so very personal. It is personal for them, for their child, and it is personal for us. The personal nature of this decision makes it also a very social one because the person is social by one’s very nature. The life that God has brought into existence begs the personal response of the parents as well as us. That response can only be “yes”. That “yes” is not always easy but our solidarity with them, our heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another has made it

possible for many women to say “yes”. In many cases, as Paul encourages us, that “yes” can lead us to a thankful heart, grateful for the life that has come to us.

The language of “privacy” diminishes the personal and suffocates the person. Our choice to be personally involved helps save the person. We remind the mother of her true worth as person whose actions are as significant to us as to her child. She is not alone nor should she act alone. All personal acts have social consequences either leading to virtue or contributing to sin. We believe in the human person and the moral and social impact of the choices one makes.

Our conviction is not an imposition of our religious preference. It is, first of all, our own acceptance of the responsibility we owe one another, especially those who are the most weak and most vulnerable among us. We speak for what is reasonable, sensible. It is common sense because it serves the common good by restoring the social dignity and moral significance of the human person, both for the mother as well as the innocent child.

In this year when we will be immersed again in the rage and rant of another election season, we should not lose sight of our personal obligation to restore sound reason and earnest compassion for the most vulnerable of our society, especially the unborn. Our choices as citizens make a difference in the lives of the most weak and poor. For the unborn it is the difference between life and death. For many women it will be the difference between desperate isolation and finding a community of hope. For us, it is the difference between the darkness and moral poverty of personal indifference and the power and possibility of an America society where we all personally committed to ensuring life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all.