



Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B
January 21, 2018

- ◆ **Forty-Fifth Anniversary of Roe v Wade**
- ◆ **60 million unborn lives killed in their mother's womb**
- ◆ **Guest Columnist — Parishioner Phil Warwick**

Each year at this time, we commemorate one of the saddest and most tragic days in our nation's history, the day our Supreme Court voted to make the killing of an unborn child a legal right for a mother.

Since that awful day (January 22, 1973), about 60 million unborn children have been denied the chance to bring their gifts to our nation. In her book *Loved as I Am*, Sr. Miriam Heidland, S.O.L.T., writes:

Abortion affects everybody on the face of the earth. Because of abortion, we are missing friends and relatives. We are missing leaders, thinkers, and spouses; we are missing countless children that those children would have had. We are missing entire generations of human beings, and the loss is staggering. Choices have consequences. (pg. 41)

The good news is that the percentage of women having abortion is less than half of what it was in 1980.

I asked parishioner and diaconate candidate, **Phil Warwick**, to write this column on the hot button issue of abortion. Phil addresses three questions:

- ◆ Does abortion help women?
- ◆ Why do we keep trying to change the laws?
- ◆ How do we change hearts?

Does abortion help women?

Roughly twenty years ago, a customer in the northeast, Dan, who knew I was Catholic, asked me if I would come over for dinner to meet his wife, Molly. I didn't know why; all he said was that she needed to talk to me. We had a deafeningly silent, tense dinner — Dan, Molly, their young daughter Becky, and me. Toward the end of dinner, Dan got up, picked up Becky, and said that he would bathe her and put her to bed. Becky's distant giggles at her father's bath-time antics relaxed the atmosphere. Even Molly chuckled, but then she started crying. "Phil, six months ago I had an abortion. You just don't bring a child into the world with that!"

"With what?" I asked. Molly explained that a genetic heart deformity ran in her family. The baby had tested positive for the defect, having approximately a 40% chance of living with a bad heart. Molly's father was a cardiologist and persuaded her to have the abortion. After all, they could always try again for a perfect child. As she talked, she shared that she was suicidal; counseling wasn't helping much. She also hated her father and blamed her husband for not stopping her.

An ongoing Finnish study, first published in 1996, demonstrated that women (ages 15-49) who go through an abortion are **six times** more likely to commit suicide than women who deliver/give birth. Further, women who delivered also had **half** the suicide rate of the general female population in the studied age group. A recent subsequent study by the same researchers showed that efforts to reduce suicide rates were not "statistically significant." An Australian study in 2013 found similar results: suicide is the leading cause of death for post-abortive women in Australia and the entire British Commonwealth. Finally, a U.S.-based study in California found that women who had state-funded abortions (i.e., low-income women) were **2.6 times** more likely to commit suicide than the general female population. Like the Finnish study, women who gave birth had *lower* suicide rates than even the general population!

What about mental health? In 2011, the British Journal of Psychiatry (Vol. 199, No. 3) reported that 10% of mental health problems and 35% of suicidal behaviors within women, ages 15-49, may be attributable to abortion! Women with a history of abortion are 55% more likely to have mental health problems! This massive study includes almost 900,000 women from six countries. We could blame Catholic or religious guilt, but studies do not support such a rash conclusion. For example, Finland is less than 0.2% Catholic, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church—the dominant, nominal religion (72% of the people; 2% practicing) — permits abortion up until "fetal viability." However, studies *do* show disproportionately higher suicide rates among post-abortive *impoverished* women—a specific target "market" of Planned Parenthood and eugenics practices.

How can anyone reasonably argue that abortion is 'good' for women, especially impoverished women?

Why do we keep trying to change the laws?

Molly put a face on the post-abortive mental health reality. Molly and Dan lived well on Dan's engineering salary, so in their case poverty was not a consideration.

At this point, I was petrified of saying the wrong thing. Molly reiterated, "You just don't bring a child into the world with that! And after all, abortion is legal. It must be okay."

We Americans love the myths of two extremes: First, we associate what is right, just, and moral, with what is legal. "It's legal, so it must be okay." Second, we claim, "Well, you can't legislate morality." Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King pointed out:

"But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example, they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests." (April 16, 1963, Letter from a Birmingham Jail)

Roman pagan culture allowed infanticide, and Christianity influenced the first laws against it under the Emperor Constantine I. It took more than 200 years! I can't deny the current legal difficulties associated with the U.S. Supreme Court, and therefore, legal change may not come in my lifetime. Right now, however, Florida Catholic Conference has identified two prolife legislative matters before the Florida House and Senate. (Please visit <https://flaccb.org/>.) As for "legislating morality," Dr. King also gave context:

"Certainly, if the problem is to be solved then in the final sense, hearts must be changed... But we must go on to say that while it may be true that morality cannot be legislated, behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart but it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me but it can keep him from lynching me." (Dec. 18, 1963, Address, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI.)

Faithful, Catholic work to end abortion continues to require an approach that changes hearts **and** labors to legally restrain—ultimately end—the practice of abortion. Had abortion been illegal, Molly would have never given into pressure. We never know the potential of a child. Molly's baby had a 60% chance of no heart issues. Further, four of the Osmond Brothers (musicians) and John Ritter (actor) have (had) congenital heart defects. Tim Tebow (Heisman Trophy winner) suffered from oxygen deprivation *in utero*.

We never know the potential of a child. Isn't that reason enough to keep working for change?

How do we change hearts?

Molly and Dan didn't belong to a specific church and would occasionally attend one of the non-denominational churches around them. I was very puzzled why Molly specifically wanted to talk to me, a Catholic, so I asked her. She responded, "Why do Catholics hate those who have abortions? Am I really going to hell?"

Shocked, I asked, "Who told you that you were going to hell?"

"Our former best friends." She then explained that their neighbors and lifelong friends were Catholic and heavily involved in a local prolife Catholic fraternal organization. When they told them Molly had the abortion, the friends stormed out, condemned them, and haven't spoken since. "What do you believe?" she asked hauntingly.

Did Dan and Molly's "best friends" change hearts?

Truth spoken without love is not truth at all. Yes, abortion is wrong, but the forgiving and reconciling love of God is far greater. From Pope Francis:

"I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life.... In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father." (Apostolic Letter, Nov. 21, 2016)

Some in the prolife movement loathe efforts to tie poverty and "womb to tomb" concerns—such as Cardinal Bernardin's image of the seamless garment—to abortion issues. If the only faith witness to a frightened, pregnant teen is a judging, condemning church, where will she turn? If the only faith witness is an apathetic, uncaring church, will she turn there? If the only example of single motherhood is a life of severe hardship, poverty and struggle, what will she want to escape? Programs, such as Pridmore House, Genesis House, Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity, and Community of Hope, give compassion to our prolife message. Consistency of life issues, such as opposing capital punishment and euthanasia, give credibility to our prolife message. The seamless garment, understood in this context, gives alternatives, hope, and above all, mercy and compassion.

I am forever saddened to think that Molly only knew a judging, condemning Catholic church. I honestly do not recall how I responded, but we remained friends. I hope that in some

small way, I helped her. Many times, I find it too easy to judge and motivate myself by a “them” and “us” attitude. I find it profoundly difficult to work for change amid conflict while loving—even the vilest person—with the very love of the Cross. Yet this is what it means to be Catholic, and only in allowing the Spirit of God to work through us can we love with the love of the Cross.

Molly and Dan divorced about a year later and didn't speak with each other for years. Three years ago, Molly died of leukemia. Dan, Becky, and Molly's father were all at her bedside when she passed away. Dan told me that she became very involved in a church in her last years. I can only hope and pray that she came to know the forgiving love of our God. (End of Phil's column.)

¹ Names and some details have been changed to protect the identity of Molly, Dan, and Becky.

² Links to these studies may be found at <http://www.lifenews.com/2014/12/19/suicide-rate-for-women-having-abortions-is-six-times-higher-than-women-giving-birth/>

Will we see the 1973 Roe v Wade decision overturned in our life time?

In his book *To Light a Fire on Earth*, Bishop Robert Barron has this interesting response:

Probably not in our lifetime, but I wouldn't rule it out. I'd make a comparison with slavery. At a certain point in American history, nobody would have imagined the possibility of slavery being overturned. Very smart people, very morally plugged-in people, were defenders of slavery in 1830, 1840, including Christians at a very high level. Politicians at the highest level didn't think slavery could be overturned in 1820 or 1840, and yet now slavery is unthinkable. It's the same with civil rights. In the 1930's and '40s, a lot of very high-placed people, including religious people, wouldn't have imagined the overturning of Jim Crow, but now it's a fact. I find that, by the way, from a theoretical standpoint, fascinating, how that happens in a society. How at one point something is commonly accepted, and fifty years later it's

unthinkable. I don't rule out that, at some point, the same could happen with abortion. I hope, in God's providence, it will become unthinkable that we're murdering children at the rate of millions per year.

Prayer for the Innocents

***God of the lost,
Listen to Rachel mourning
her children,
refusing to be consoled
because her children are no more.
The slaughter of innocent
people is not held back
by the love of weeping mothers
or the bitter tears of fathers
mourning the death of
their sons and daughters,
not by the cries and moans
of the children,
looking for parents
who can comfort them no more.
Let us hear the mute voice
of dead witnesses;
let us put a stop to the
death of the innocent.
Teach us, in their loss,
to stem the fury
of hatred, division, prejudice and war.
Help us, for we are unable to help ourselves.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.***

Have a blessed week,

Fr Barron