



Sixth Sunday of Easter May 21, 2017 A

- ◆ **Florida Bishop, Republican Congressman, and others weigh in on proposed Health Care Act**
- ◆ **Always be ready to give a reason for your Catholic beliefs to those who inquire of you**

The following article appeared in last week's Florida Catholic (May 12-13).

The American Health Care Act that passed by a four-vote margin May 4 in the House has "major defects," said Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Social Development.

"It is deeply disappointing that the voices of those who will be most severely impacted were not heeded," Bishop Dewane said in a May 4 statement. "The AHCA does offer critical life protections, and our health care system desperately needs these safeguards. But still, vulnerable people must not be left in poor and worsening circumstances as Congress attempts to fix the current and impending problems with the Affordable Care Act."

He added, "When the Senate takes up the AHCA, it must act decisively to remove the harmful proposals from the bill that will affect low-income people—including immigrants—as well as add vital conscience protections, or begin reform efforts anew. Our health care policy must honor all human life and dignity from conception to natural death, as well as defend the sincerely held moral and religious beliefs of those who have any role in the health care system."

One of 20 Republicans to vote against the bill was Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., co-chair of the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus.

"I voted no on the AHCA largely because it cuts Medicaid funding by \$839 billion; undercuts essential health benefits such as maternity care, newborn care, hospitalization and pediatric services; includes 'per capita caps' and weakens coverage for pre-existing health conditions—all of which will hurt disabled persons, especially and including children and adults with autism, the elderly and the working poor," Smith said in a May 4 statement.

"Over the past several years, we have seen the flaws of Obamacare, including increased premiums and deductibles, diminishing health care options and patients losing plans they were assured they could keep. These very real problems underscore the need for meaningful bipartisan reform," Smith added.

Those opposing the bill cited reductions in coverage and cost increases. Those favoring the bill cited its pro-life provisions.

"The vote falls far short of protecting the millions of Americans who have insurance or gained it under the Affordable Care Act," said a May 4 statement from Dominican Sister Donna Markham, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA. "It also fails to provide access to affordable health care for the millions who still live without coverage."

"The role of health care should implicitly be to provide the highest quality care for the largest number of people, in the interest of maintaining dignity and quality of life, as our faith calls us to do. It is immoral to restrict access to care for anyone, but especially for the most vulnerable, including those who need consistent treatment and our aging population," said a May 5 statement by Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network.

"As arguably the most powerful, developed country in the world, it is inexcusable that our health care system is failing so many. We can and must do better," Carolan said.

"The passage of the American Health Care Act in the House is a dangerous and irresponsible step that threatens access to health care for at least 24 million Americans. It violates Christian and Catholic faith teaching and the values of our nations," said Sister Simone Campbell, a Sister of Social Service who is executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, in a May 4 statement.

"This was not the faithful way forward," she added. "We are hurting our people and rewarding the rich through tax breaks disguised as a health care reform bill. This is literal 'blood money.' The blood of those who are denied coverage will be on the hands of those who voted for this bill."

"Today's House vote marks the beginning of the end of the shell game Planned Parenthood plays with public money. That the American Health Care Act limits Medicaid funds to entities that don't kill people is entirely appropriate, not to mention a step that's long overdue," said a May 4 statement by Father Frank Pavone, national president of Priests for Life.

"Sending hundreds of millions of dollars a year to an organization that dismembers 320,000 unborn babies a year adds up to a travesty of justice," he added. "The

Senate should approve the defunding legislation as soon as possible and send it to the president's desk. The scam of using public money to prop up abortion business needs to be terminated."

"Abortion is not health care, and in light of that, this bill provides Hyde (Amendment)-like protections and redirects funding away from America's largest abortion provider, Planned Parenthood, to community health centers that offer comprehensive women's care, and already outnumber Planned Parenthood clinics by 20 to 1," said a May 4 statement by Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life.

"We urge our U.S. senators to follow the House's lead and ensure that pro-life protections and the redirection of Planned Parenthood funding remain, because without it, this bill will fail," Mancini said.

"National Right to Life praises the Republican leadership for putting this bill together and making sure the most vulnerable members of our society are protected," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee, in a May 4 statement, "Over 2 million Americans are alive today because of the Hyde Amendment. This new health care bill ensures that we are one step closer to getting the federal government entirely out of the business of subsidizing abortion."

"This is a hugely important step, but it is just the first step to improving health care for all Americans, especially the vulnerable," said a May 4 statement by Louis Brown, director of the Christ Medicus Foundation, based in the Detroit suburb of Troy, Mich.

"The American Health Care Act begins the process of increasing meaningful medical access for individuals and families across the country by returning focus to the doctor-patient relationship," Brown said.

"With today's vote in the House, our leaders in Congress have taken a giant step toward keeping the promise they made to voters last year to defund Planned Parenthood. Now it's time for the Senate and President Trump to get the job done," said Eric Scheidler, a national director of #ProtestPP, an anti-Planned Parenthood group, in a May 4 statement.

"Protecting Medicaid is a priority for the faith community. The 'fixes' made to the AHCA do nothing to change the fact that millions of low-income Americans will lose their health coverage," said a May 4 statement by the Rev. David Beckmann, a Lutheran minister who is president of Bread for the World, the anti-hunger lobby. "Medical bills often drive families, especially those who struggle to make ends meet, into hunger and poverty. We strongly urge the Senate to reject this bill."

Rev. Beckmann said the AHCA "will push millions of people into hunger and poverty. The AHCA takes away health insurance from tens of millions of Americans and drives up costs for millions more. This is not what Americans were promised."

"Since failing to pass the original AHCA, House leadership has made the legislation worse by providing even fewer protections for family farmers and rural Americans," said Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union, in a May 4 statement. "NFU's priority for any bill is that it offers coverage for more people rather than fewer. We look forward to working with members of the Senate to defeat this legislation that would fail millions of people, especially family farmers and rural Americans."

"This isn't a health care bill—it's a half-a-billion-dollar tax cut for corporations, insurance executives, and the wealthiest Americans," said Communications Workers of America president Chris Shelton in a May 4 statement. "At least 24 million people will lose their health care and Americans age 50 and older will see their costs skyrocket under the 'age tax' the bill institutes, all to provide a big tax break for corporations and the wealthy."

"We support efforts to strengthen and stabilize our nation's health care system and extend insurance coverage and protections," said Arthur C. Evans, Jr., CEO of the American Psychological Association. "However, the American Health Care Act is not the answer. Accordingly, we call on the Senate to reject the bill due to its projected adverse impact on the well-being of our nation, particularly on individuals with mental health, behavioral and substance use disorders."

Always be ready to give a reason for your Catholic beliefs to those who inquire of you

In the second reading today, Peter says: *"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence"* (1Pt 3:15).

This verse could be interpreted on two levels: spiritual and theological.

On the **spiritual** level, the verse exhorts us to be always ready to witness to our faith. Millions of believers belong to a church family today because of the witness of other believers. This is especially true of Protestant evangelical churches. Their leaders have done a great job at teaching and inspiring their people to witness to their Christian beliefs and in motivating them to invite others into their church. While we all know that *'witness of life'* is more important than *'witness of words,'* words are also important—especially when people are going through a tough time spiritually. If the Samaritan woman in John 4 had not been willing to share her witness with the people of her village, they might never have come to know Jesus. Fortunately for them, she had no desire to keep her encounter with Jesus her best-kept secret.

I sometimes wonder how many people are lost to our Catholic Church because so many of us are timid about inviting others to church or sharing our faith with others. Needless to say, ‘witness of life’ is our best advertisement for our faith. After all, St. Francis of Assisi used to say: “Speak the Gospel always. If necessary, use words.” Sometimes, example is the best way to go. But sometimes, example can and should be accompanied by words. In the often used words of the late Pope John Paul II: “Do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid to share your faith. Do not be afraid to invite a non-churchgoer or a seeking non-Catholic to Church. I do know that some of you have grown very much in this area of your spiritual development because I have met people who now come to our Church because of your good example and witness.

On the *theological* level, the above verse from our second reading could also be interpreted to mean that we Catholics should be prepared to explain to others why we believe what we believe. I acknowledge that this is not an easy thing to do for the majority of Catholics, especially those who go through life with an elementary school understanding of their faith.

Thankfully, more and more Catholics are making time to become educated on Catholic beliefs and practices. More and more are becoming skilled at explaining, among other things:

- ◆ Why we are not a ‘*sola scriptura*’ (only in the Bible) Church. Many, if not all, Protestant ministers who joined the Catholic Church have stated that a part of their journey was discovering that the Bible does *not* say that one must only believe what is *explicitly* stated in the Bible (see my Catechism Article #2 for more on this issue)
- ◆ Catholic beliefs about Mary and Marian devotion (Catechism Article #10)
- ◆ Why Catholics have the practice of sacramental confession (Catechism Article #15)
- ◆ Why Catholics believe that Jesus founded the Catholic Church, why the Pope is the successor of St. Peter, and why we believe in papal infallibility when it comes to matters of faith and morals (Catechism Article #s 8 & 9)
- ◆ Why Catholics believe in Purgatory (Catechism Article #11)

Being a humble and proud Catholic

Humility is the foundation virtue of the spiritual life. The practice of this virtue should help us to not think that our Church or we individually are better than others. We are what we are because of the grace of God and our cooperation with that grace. Any pride we may have had as an institution took a huge hit recently with the revelations about the clerical sex scandals. Thank God, we seem to have very much cleaned up our act in that area.

Despite the Church’s sinfulness and crimes down through the ages, we have lots of good reasons to be proud of our Church. In his introduction to his book *Rediscovering Catholicism*, Matthew Kelly names five great reasons why we can be humbly proud of our Catholic institution.

- *Education.* The Catholic Church is the institution that educated the masses of people who were not born into nobility or wealth. Matt Kelly writes:

The global reach and contribution of the Church is enormous, but the national impact of the Church on every aspect of society is also impressive, though largely unknown. In the United States alone, the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students every day, at a cost of ten billion dollars a year to parents and parishes. If there were no Catholic schools, these same students would have to be educated in public schools, which would cost eighteen billion dollars. The Catholic education system alone saves American taxpayers eighteen billion dollars a year.

In the field of secondary education, the Church has more than 230 colleges and universities in the U.S., with an enrollment of seven hundred thousand students. And the Catholic and non-Catholic students educated in our schools and colleges go on to occupy many of the highest positions in any field. (p.18)

- *Healthcare.* The Catholic Church has a nonprofit healthcare system comprising 637 hospitals that treat one in five patients in the United States every day.
- *Outreach to the poor.* After the federal government, the Catholic Church in the United States helps the poor more than any other agency or institution. Wherever a global disaster occurs, Catholic Relief Services is present and helping. At home, *Catholic Charities* and many other Catholic agencies are on the front lines of outreach to the poor. Here in our own city, our Church is vigorously involved in outreach to the poor through our Thrift Store, Social Concerns, participation in Daily Bread, Habitat for Humanity, etc.
- The Catholic Church has produced thousands and thousands of holy men and women. While holiness is the work of God in the life of an individual, the individual must cooperate with God’s grace. We need guidance and help as we seek to live a holy life. Millions of us have found that help and guidance in the Catholic Church.
- Down through the ages, especially in the Middle Ages, the Church has been a great patron of the arts—which elevates the human mind and heart to God.

Some important Do’s and Don’ts in the Gospel

Reflecting on today’s Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

A number of times during the last supper, Christ said these or similar words to his apostles: “If you love me,

keep my commandments.” Clearly he was not talking about the Ten Commandments. What commandments then was he talking about? A look at the Gospels will provide some clues as to the answer. There we find certain Do’s and Don’ts he talked about.

However, it’s clear that he is talking, not so much about commandments as about guidelines for his followers. What we are really dealing with is a new spirit, new values and attitudes towards God, towards our neighbor, and towards life.

Keeping this in mind, to look at some of the Do’s and Don’ts he talked about is not only helpful, but necessary. Let us imagine that Christ is speaking directly to us.

Don’ts

Do not return evil for evil. Nothing is achieved by retaliation, except to pile darkness upon darkness.

Do not judge your neighbor. No one knows all the facts in any particular case except God. Therefore, leave judgement to God.

Do not condemn your neighbor. This follows from the last. If you are not to pass judgement on your neighbor, neither are you to pass sentence on him.

Do not worry about food, and drink, and clothes, as if these were the most important things in life. Make it your first concern to live a life worthy of a son or a daughter of God, and all the rest will fall into place.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves here on earth—money, property, goods, and so on. These are like chaff in the eyes of God, chaff to be blown away in the first winds of judgement.

Do not look back once you have put your hand to the plough, that is, once you have decided to follow my way. And once you have made what you are sure is a right decision in life, go forward trusting in God.

Do not give up hope when times are rough. Keep on trusting in me and the Father. Remember that you are worth more than thousands of sparrows.

Do’s

Let the light of your goodness shine before people. The light you shed around you will help others to find their way, and the Father will be glorified.

Love your enemies. To be kind to those you don’t like, or who may have been unkind to you, is hard. But if you do this, you will be the salt of the earth.

Give generously. The measure you give to others, will be the measure you receive from God.

Forgive those who sin against you, then you have nothing to fear.

Clean the inside of cup and dish, and the outside will become clean too.

See that your minds and hearts are clean. Then all your thoughts, words and deeds will also be clean, like water coming from an unpolluted well.

Take this bread and eat it. Take this cup and drink it. Do this in memory of me. In the Eucharistic Banquet you will find the nourishment you need to live as my disciples.

And love one another the way I have loved you, then all will know that you are disciples of mine.

We can’t truly call ourselves disciples of Jesus if we don’t listen to his words and make an effort to live by them. One wouldn’t be much of a Christian if one didn’t try to live as Jesus taught.

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Universal Prayer of Pope Clement XI

When Mary came to Fatima, she asked the children to pray for the conversion of sinners. Praying for the conversion of family members, for those who have no one to pray for them and for our own ongoing conversion is a good and holy thing to do. The following prayer for conversion is what we pray in Church at the end of Mass.

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning,

I long for you as my last end,

I praise you as my constant helper,

And I call on you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

in the way you ask,

for as long as you ask,

because you ask it.

***Let me love you, my Lord and my God,
and see myself as I really am:***

a pilgrim in this world,

a Christian called to respect and love

all whose lives I touch.

Amen.

Have a blessed week,

