

Temples of the Holy Spirit

Most Reverend Bishop Rose

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, January 19, 2003, Cathedral of St. Andrew

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

This is the prayer that Eli taught to young Samuel. It is not recorded in the Scriptures simply to tell us something about how the great Samuel got his start as a prophet. It is recorded in the Scriptures for us. It is recorded for use in our daily lives whenever God speaks to us.

For example, each time we listen to the word of God, that prayer should be on our lips. And especially when we hear God’s word proclaimed here at Mass, where we are gathered together in Jesus’ name as His Church, that prayer should express what is in our hearts: “Speak, Lord, for I, your servant, am listening.”

As we listen to the word this morning, the Lord speaks to us through the apostle Paul, writing to his converts in Corinth. And the Lord’s message is one that we need, and that our society needs, more than ever.

Paul writes to the Corinthians about the dignity of the human person, the value of every human being: **“Do you not know that you are not your own? You have been purchased, at a price!”** Each of us is a purchased person, a redeemed person. And Paul is emphatically speaking about the whole human person: body as well as soul.

There were many people in Corinth in Paul’s day who held that material things were of no value; only spiritual things counted. What was material was headed for destruction; only what was spiritual would endure.

Since the body was material, it had no value, and therefore no morality. That meant you could do what you wanted with the body. What really mattered was what you did in and with your spirit. And so these very “spiritual” people felt free to give themselves up to any and every kind of immorality with the body. That was a common belief in Corinth, and people were living accordingly.

Paul opposed both their teaching and their conduct. He opposed them because of the Gospel, the Good News that he was preaching all over the world: the Good News of the resurrection.



The heart of Paul’s Gospel was this: God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, body and soul, and has promised us the same resurrection, body and soul. In the meantime, our bodies are temples, not just of our own souls, but of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the baptized.

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him...Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? Our dignity and value as human beings includes the whole person, body and soul. That is the clear message of St. Paul to us today.

Now, the Lord speaks to us not only in the Scriptures but also in the “signs of the times.” There are signs of the times today that show us how much we still need this message about the value of the human person, body and soul.

This week will bring the thirtieth anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision that opened the floodgates to abortion in this country. There are at least 4,000 reported abortions a day, over 1.3 million each year. Despite publicity given to the most difficult cases, only one percent of all abortions involve cases of rape or incest or danger to the mother’s life. In fact, nearly half are second or third abortions for the women involved. For many, abortion has become just another method of artificial birth control.

The signs of the times through which the Lord speaks to us are easily understood, if we are willing to listen. We can trace the decline of stable marriage, of ordinary family life, of the moral education of our children to the introduction of the pill and other artificial contraceptives in the sixties. The statistics are all there to be seen, if we are willing to make the connections.

Once we decided that sex was for fun, and need have nothing to do with marital love and the procreation of children, the door was open for all the consequences that have followed. Pope Paul VI, in his much maligned letter *Humanae Vitae* of 1968, outlined what would be the consequences of the “contraceptive mentality.” He was right. And among those consequences was a great increase in the use of abortion.

And so, once abortion on demand for the whole nine months became a legal right in 1973, it was predictable that all human life in our country would be devalued as a result. If we can kill our own most helpless, the unborn, for simple convenience, then what limits can there be to our right to kill? The elderly, the ill, the handicapped, the newborn are increasingly at risk in our society. The Lord speaks to us through signs of the times.

But the picture is not all grim, by any means. There are very hopeful signs as well. There is a huge pro-life movement in this country, which is having its impact, and will not go away. We are grateful to those who have worked tirelessly in this cause, often at great personal sacrifice, ever since 1973. They are having an effect.

Today fewer abortions are being done each year, and fewer doctors are willing to be involved in abortion. Recent polls show that nationally the tide has turned: More Americans are identifying themselves as “pro-life”, than are identifying themselves as “pro-choice.”

Medical advances such as ultrasound have helped us all to have a clearer and stronger appreciation of the humanity of the unborn child. The debate on partial birth abortion has forced the national media, for the first time, to picture graphically just what gruesome procedures are being used on the unborn.

Since 1973 thousands of pro-life groups, individual parishes, Catholic social service agencies and pregnancy resource centers have offered support and practical assistance to millions of women facing difficult pregnancies. There are over three thousand such resource centers in the country. We have them in the Diocese.

At least a hundred Catholic dioceses now have Project Rachel. This is a program that assists women who have undergone an abortion to find reconciliation and healing and peace. We have Project Rachel in our Diocese.

Most state legislatures have enacted laws to regulate the practice of abortion and reduce it's occurrence. This has been true in our own state, where the number of abortions has declined steadily for several years now. We are grateful to our government leaders who have supported such legislation.

Probably most encouraging of all is that many of our young people have joined the pro-life movement. That is a wonderful development, and gives us every reason to hope that before too long, full protection will be restored to the right to life of all those whose rights have been ignored or reduced over the last thirty years.

As Catholic Christians who believe in the supreme value of the human person, we have an obligation to continue our efforts on behalf of the dignity of human life at all stages, from conception to natural death.

We must keep abreast of the kinds of facts I have mentioned this morning, so that we can really hear the Lord speaking to us in the signs of the times. And we must continue to listen to the Lord speaking to us in Scripture and in the authentic teaching of His Church. The Lord does not fail to provide us with the guidance we need, if we listen.

Pope John Paul II has called for a new evangelization in our time. Through the Year of the Great Jubilee he has initiated a great renewal of the Church in these early years of the third millennium of the Gospel. A major theme of that new evangelization and renewal must be the age-old Judeo-Christian message of the dignity of the human person in God's eyes and in ours.

As part of this effort, in all the dioceses of the United States, January 22, 2003, will be observed as a particular day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantees of the right to life. I invite all of you to join us in this day of penance and prayer.

In that same spirit we pray today: “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” And the Lord replies in the words of St. Paul: “You are not your own. You have been purchased, at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.”

