

## Fr. Michael Sparough Homily - Abortion Stops a Beating Heart

### **Gospel: Mark 3:1-6**

Jesus entered the synagogue.  
There was a man there who had a withered hand.  
They watched Jesus closely  
to see if he would cure him on the sabbath  
so that they might accuse him.  
He said to the man with the withered hand,  
"Come up here before us."  
Then he said to the Pharisees,  
"Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil,  
to save life rather than to destroy it?"  
But they remained silent.  
Looking around at them with anger  
and grieved at their hardness of heart,  
Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."  
He stretched it out and his hand was restored.  
The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel  
with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

### **Homily: *Abortion Stops a Beating Heart***

Her name is Lisa, and her story is typical, though nonetheless tragic for being so. Lisa is having trouble sleeping nights. Once upon a time, Lisa was in love. She gave away her heart and her soul the way teenagers have always done. But she was more in love with the idea of being in love than with the person she thought she loved, and she began to make some bad decisions. She chose to love in the easy ways but in none of the real. And soon Lisa found herself seventeen years old and pregnant.

Because commitment was not something taken to their bed, Lisa's boyfriend ran. Besides, he had a deeper interest—working on a football scholarship. And Lisa, all alone and pregnant, decided to take care of a problem that should never have happened.

One terrible afternoon, for \$250, she bought what she thought would be a short-term solution. Instead, it became a long term nightmare. You see, she is having trouble sleeping nights. Lisa sometimes wakes up to the sound of a baby crying, and she wonders how so much love could end in so much hurt. And God weeps in heaven. He weeps for his two precious children—for the baby that will never cry—and for Lisa who will always hear the silent cry.

So began a homily that Cardinal Joseph Bernardin gave at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, January 1st, 1986, commemorating the legalization of abortion within this country. Next Monday, January 22nd, marks the 45th commemoration of the Roe vs Wade decision by the

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Supreme Court which paved the way for legalization of abortion in our country. The stats on abortion are sobering. Based on available State-wide data—which can only be an estimate because not all States are willing to turn over the data—the closest estimates for 2015—which is the year we have the most reliable data,—908,000 abortions were performed in the United States. 908,000 abortions in the year 2015. That's more than 2,500 abortions a day. That's more babies killed in a single year than all of the wars the United States has fought in.

What we've discovered about babies in the uterus, as science continues to advance, makes a compelling case that life begins at conception. Only 18 days after conception there's a heartbeat. It's hard to argue that something with a heartbeat is just a lump of tissue. Abortion truly stops a beating heart. According to studies, between 2003 and 2005, 20-35% of babies born at 23 weeks gestation survive, while 50-70% of babies born 24-25 weeks survive and more than 90% of babies born at 26-27 weeks survive. In fact, the earliest baby to survive premature birth was born at only 21 weeks and 6 days.

What we've discovered about the abortion industry is that it's far from clean. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, has many quotes that can only be described as racist. 79% of Planned Parenthood facilities are located in minority neighborhoods. African Americans represent 12% of the American population but they represent 40% of the children aborted in this country. Latinos are 16% of the population, they represent 25% of the abortions. That is to say, the abortion industry strategically targets minority neighborhoods.

Planned Parenthood has been under investigation ever since the Center for Medical Progress, headed by a young Catholic man named David Daleiden, released a series of undercover videos documenting a casualness in discussing the sale of fetal tissue and suggesting strong evidence that Planned Parenthood is profiting from the sale of fetal body parts. The House subcommittee investigating this issued a report on *Human Fetal Tissue Research, Context and Controversy*, published in December 2016. Senator Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, referred Planned Parenthood and other providers to the FBI for investigation. The Justice Department is currently investigating. Senator Grassley said at the time that the committee had discovered enough evidence that shows how abortion providers had transferred fetal tissue and body parts from aborted fetuses for research by charging amounts higher than they actually cost. In simple terms, Planned Parenthood is making money on selling fetal tissue.

Who are the women having abortions? In a survey released in November 2017, 70% of the women who have had abortions self-identify as Christians. 43% of those women say they've attended a Christian Church at least once a month and more at the time when they aborted their child. What should be our response as Catholics and as Christians? Certainly to stand against the abortion industry, but as Cardinal Bernardin has said, as Cardinal Cupich has reiterated—as Pope Francis has said quite clearly—it's not enough to be simply against abortion. We want to be pro-life, protecting life from conception through natural death.

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Shortly after the Supreme Court issued its landmark decision 45 years ago, in his address as Cardinal Archbishop at the time, Archbishop Bernardin used the phrase *evil* four times in a single paragraph describing the court's decision. As early as 1976, Cardinal Bernardin called for, what he called, a consistent ethic of life as he struggled with how the Church should approach social issues in light of the Supreme Court decisions of legalization of abortion. In his first formal address at Fordham University, a Jesuit University in New York in December of 1983, Cardinal Bernardin outlined in detail what he called this consistent ethic of life, commonly known as the seamless garment approach to life.

That phrase was echoed by Pope John Paul in his encyclical on the Sacredness of Life and Cardinal Cupich, a week from Monday will give an address in downtown Chicago at Holy Name Cathedral, talking about the importance of bringing back this consistent ethic of life as we approach the issues of life within our own time.

The Church stands with the sacredness of life from conception to natural death. It's important that we as Catholic Christians not vilify women who have had abortions. It's been my privilege, and I use that term privilege, to be able to sit with many women over the years who have had abortions. And the church's response—it's called project Rachel—is to pray for these women. Because, as Cardinal Bernardin's story illustrates at the beginning of this homily, there are few women that I've ever met that don't feel the pain and the regret for decades later. It's a sin that's very hard to heal, but not impossible to heal. But our response needs to be for women and men who have made that tragic decision, one of compassion, mercy and forgiveness. The adage that the Church uses is, "hate the sin, love the sinner."

As Jesus stood before the woman caught in adultery his response was, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." I think we as Catholics need to be involved in the political debate, but more importantly, we need to be people who support life, not just in the womb, but all phases of life. We need to give money, not just to protest marches against abortion, but to Catholic Charities, and their outreach to pregnant women. To women who are pregnant, especially in poor areas, to be able to provide adequate medical care in the midst of their pregnancy. To make a strong case for adoption for women who are not yet ready to raise a child. We need to think about these realities and the regret that so many women have when they make the tragic decision to end the life of their unborn child; a regret that will never go away.

As we enter into this commemoration, 45 years after that decision by the Supreme Court, let's continue to pray for great wisdom to prevail. The statistics are sobering in our country. After all of the efforts of not just the Catholic Church, not just Christian churches, but many people, America is still badly divided on the issue. The latest survey that I read is that it's 50% pro-choice and 50% pro-life. That's to say that we as a nation are split down the middle. I don't think that we're ever going to simply solve this through political legislation, even if the Supreme Court were to reverse its decision. We need to win the hearts and minds, especially of young women.

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The majority of abortions are for women in their 20s. The majority of abortions are from unmarried women. Let's make the case for the sanctity of life. Let's win their consciences and let's provide services that are adequate so that a woman doesn't have to make that terrible choice because she doesn't have enough money to feed her baby or receive adequate healthcare. In today's Gospel Jesus looks to the Pharisees and says, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil? To save life rather than to destroy it? Let's pray that we as Catholic Christians are people who save life rather than destroy it and who reach out with mercy and compassion for those who have made the tragic mistake. Amen. (Amen.)