



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194

202-541-3070 • FAX 202-541-3054 • EMAIL PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG • WEB WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE

“Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Living”

Bishop William E. Lori, Bishop of Bridgeport

National Prayer Vigil for Life 7:30 A.M. Closing Mass

Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Monday, January 24, 2011

My dear friends in Christ, you and I are here on pilgrimage and like pilgrims the world over, [we] find our journey is not necessarily an easy one. Many of you got up earlier than you ever dreamed possible to catch a plane to be here. Many more rode sleeplessly for hours on buses or in vans. All of us have left the comfort of our homes to keep vigil, to keep a vigil of prayer for the cause of life. This morning, we are joined yet again by the most courageous of all pilgrims, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

From the first moment that Mary learned that her cousin, Elizabeth, was with child, Mary hastened through the hill country to be there for her, to be there with her. Mary’s pilgrimage was not easy. There were no planes or buses or vans or fast food restaurants. Only hilly paths, only mountain roads upon which the young Virgin walked.

When she reached her destination, Elizabeth addressed Mary as “the mother of my Lord” before Mary had given birth. In this way, Elizabeth recognized the humanity of the child in Mary’s womb and the child in Elizabeth’s womb, namely John the Baptist, leaped for joy. He recognized the one who “came that we might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). There at the threshold of Zachariah’s house, the Gospel of Life was anticipated. In response, Mary’s song of praise echoes through the centuries: “The Lord has done great things for me and holy is his name!” Now, Mary joins us on this pilgrimage dedicated to the cause of life. This pilgrimage, dedicated to the sanctity of every human life from the moment of conception until natural death. Listening to God’s word and the reading from the book of Revelation, we recognize Mary as the great sign in the heavens, “the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head, a crown of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1). We recognize her because in her radiance, Mary has drawn so near to us. Just as she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, so, through the centuries, Mary has visited the Church in her pilgrimage in time and history.

We think of Mary’s great apparition and words in Fatima. Today, we are drawn to the Tepeyac hill in Mexico where in the 16th century, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared, not to a governor and not to a bishop but to a humble native American, Saint Juan Diego.

Even as Mary’s original journey through the hill country of Judea was difficult, so too her journey to the hill of Tepeyac took her right into the heart of a culture of death. She came to a culture where the sacrifice of infants to appease angry idols was common. She came to a culture where conquistadores plundered and killed the native peoples. Just as Mary arrived at Elizabeth’s house carrying in her womb

her son, Jesus, so also Mary arrived at Tepeyac Hill wearing a dark purplish ribbon, a ribbon which indicated to Saint Juan Diego and his entire culture that she was with child.

Mary miraculously depicted herself on Juan Diego's cloak as a mother with child. As the Mother of God, and the mother of all the living, she came as a messenger of hope and reconciliation. She embodied the Gospel of Life we are here to proclaim. We rejoice that Pope Benedict XVI will soon beatify Pope John Paul II. What a joy it will be to call him Blessed John Paul the Great. We ardently pray for the day when he'll be canonized.

So, today, we recall what Pope John Paul II said when he visited the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. He said "May the Continent of Hope also be the Continent of Life!" This is our cry: life with dignity for all. Dear brothers and sisters, the time has come to banish once and for all from this continent every attack against life!" The continent to which the Pope referred is America. North, Central, South America. It is the land where we live. It's the land we call our own. Encouraged by the hope that our Lady of Guadalupe embodies, we make our own the cry, "Life for all with dignity!"

We make this cry because we recognize that far too many children die because of abortion. Because we recognize that our tax dollars can now be used to procure abortion in the name of health care. We make this cry because we recognize that the freedom of Catholic hospitals and Catholic health care workers not to participate in abortion, not to cooperate in abortion and other prescribed procedures is now threatened. We make this cry; "life for all with dignity" because we recognize that family and marriage are being undermined by same-sex marriage, by divorce, by cohabitation, by contraception. Yes, we raise our voices, because we recognize the frail elderly are at risk from legislation that would make euthanasia an acceptable part of our culture.

Just as Our Lady of Guadalupe stepped into a culture of death in 16th century Mexico, so now she guides our steps as we confront a culture of death in 21st century America. A culture of death is a culture that has lost its hope, its vision for the future. By contrast, the pro-life movement is young, alive, and forward-looking. Ever the Mother of Christ who is our hope, Mary helps us not only to engage in the political action that is our right as citizens but also to bear witness by word and deed to a message of hope; the message that no human being is an accident. For as Pope Benedict has said, no one of us is "Some casual, meaningless product of evolution . . . each of us is the result of a thought of God. . . each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary" (Benedict XVI, Inaugural Homily). This is the message of hope that we humbly offer to women considering an abortion, to those in need of healing in the aftermath of an abortion. And to those who find themselves deeply unhappy, because they have been deceived by a culture that relentlessly tells us that we are happy only when we live for ourselves and not for others, that we are free only when our autonomy is absolute. God made us, you and me, in this image and likeness. This means we are made to be with others and for others.

Some may think that efforts such as we are making today are useless. After all, since 1973, we've been struggling to overturn Roe v. Wade yet abortion remains the law of the land and there are new threats on the horizon. Are we not like the Spanish missionaries in the 16th century in Mexico who almost despaired that the Gospel could ever take root in the land of such cruelty? Yet, after Our Lady of

Guadalupe appeared, within a few generations, some nine million people in the new world opened their hearts to Christ. They did this because they were led to the Church by the Virgin with child, Our Lady of Guadalupe.

You will not hear this on the news but poll after poll shows that for the first time since Roe versus Wade in 1973, a solid majority of Americans are now pro-life. When we hear a majority of Americans are pro-life, it can hide the reality of what that really means. It doesn't just mean that our numbers are greater by a percentage point or two. When you get beyond the labels you see that Americans are now moving in huge numbers away from Roe v. Wade and toward a pro-life position. Polling in the last year by the Knights of Columbus shows that 8 out of 10 Americans would restrict abortion far more than is currently the case. And this includes more than two-thirds of those who call themselves pro-choice. In addition, nearly 6 in 10 young people say that abortion is morally wrong, people your age.

Young people, understand this. Our message, our presence here year after year demonstrates that the truth is having an effect. So much hard work. So much sacrifice, so much courage has gone into all of this. But it could not have been done without Our Lady of Guadalupe and her powerful intercession. Mary is with us today. She is with us in this Mass, even as she is with us in every Mass. So walking with Mary, we bear witness to the Gospel of Life, not only by what we say but also by the love we show for unborn children and their expectant mothers. For the poor and the needy, the stranger and the outcast. For the frail elderly and the handicapped. All whose lives are threatened.

Joined to Mary, the Mother of the Living, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and sustained by the prayers of Pope John Paul the Great, and united to Pope Benedict XVI, may we indeed be messengers of love and builders of a culture of life! May God bless us and keep us in His love in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.