

Vigil Mass of the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Closing of the Conference on *Humanae Vitae*  
July 21, 2001

Holy Cross Church  
680 W. Peachtree Street, NW.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30308-1984

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thirty-three years ago, this month, the birth of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's definitive encyclical on the transmission of human life, was not accomplished without pain and suffering. I remember well, the travails that our Mother the Church went through, as this child of wisdom made its way into a world already set on a course of opposition and rejection.

I was chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington at the time, and as events unfolded within a few days, I realized that the Church, both the Faithful and the Clergy, and that I myself, would forever be changed by the publication of this momentous and decisive document.

For it was no surprise, but still a great disappointment, when within a day of the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, more than sixty priests of the Archdiocese of Washington, announced, by publishing it in the *Washington Post*, their opposition to the teachings of the Holy Father, of the Church, of the magisterium, and we must believe, of the Holy Spirit.

The Cardinal Archbishop of Washington, Patrick O'Boyle, with no happiness about it, called me into his office, and said, "We cannot let this go by. Call every one of the priests named in the protest, tell them I am suspending their faculties to celebrate the Sacraments, and let them know that I am ready and anxious to speak with each of them individually."

It was undoubtedly one of the hardest moments he had ever faced, and in assisting him at this difficult moment, it was also a moment in time that changed me — for it left upon me the scars of battle, scars we must and will win, if we engage to defend the Church against her opponents, and if we strive to win back, those who have set themselves against the Church and her God-given teachings.

The Church struggles still with the difficulties of putting *Humanae Vitae* into practice, and part of the reason we are here, is to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as we attempt in our own time, to make this teaching a more accepted and vital part of the Church's ongoing life and mission.

But even Pope Paul VI, in his prophetic wisdom, possibly did not see all the trends, all the movements, all the individual perversities that were to be raised against the sanctity of life in the years since he spoke so forcefully against the comparatively simple sin of artificial contraception.

The evolving disregard for the conception and generation of life, has been, in large part, responsible for even more outrageous acts against life in other phases of its existence. Abortion and euthanasia, the front and back doors of the house of the culture of death, have now opened to reveal rooms of more insidious evil, harbored between these two portals of hell. Eugenics, genetic engineering, cloning, embryonic stem cell research - these are the inevitable progeny of man's arrogant assumption of the management of life, which began with the pro-contraception movements.

Where can it lead from here - we can only wonder, and acknowledge the aptness of the old prayer, which describes the "wickedness and snares of the devil," and admit, that the genius of man, when turned to evil, is indeed amazing, and true to the nature of original sin, diabolical as well.

But for the Church, for Catholics, for all spouses who live in the family of the Church, and who wish to make peace with their consciences, *Humanae Vitae* is far more than a prophecy and a recollection of what could and what did go wrong.

Humanae Vitae is in fact, the roadmap to marital sanctity and marital stability - and more - it is the map which will ultimately lead to a better world, at least for those who follow its guiding lights.

In this Sunday's Gospel, we hear of a decisive moment in the lives of our Lord's disciples - not a moment of conflict limited to Mary and Martha - not just our Lord's solution to the anger of Martha and perhaps the satisfaction of Mary -but a moment of decision for all Christians. Which is to be the most important focus in life - living a life in service to goodness, or living a life in service to the Lord? The two seem close, and in some cases, seem to be the same thing. But they are not. Ethical people are good people - and we get along with them, respect them, and live with them in peace. But Christians are people who are ethical because they are the Lord's. The goodness which brings salvation comes from devotion to the Lord. Goodness in and of itself saves no one. Christ did not say, "Do good, and that will take care of your sins." Christ said, "*Do these two things -love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole heart and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself*" It is clear that love of God must come first, and then the rest will follow.

Such a moment of decision is reflected in the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*. Plenty of seemingly responsible husbands and wives decide, on their own, that for the good of everyone involved, they must limit the number of lives they will conceive, and that the easiest, most practical way of doing this is by artificial contraception - the unnatural interruption of the act of conception. To do this is to commit the fault of Martha - to put convenience, to put material considerations, to put comfort above the first duty of marriage, which is, to love and serve God by doing His will. And His will, as expressed by the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not to interfere unnaturally with the generation of life. *Humanae Vitae* is the blueprint for incorporating the will of God into the life of Christian marriage. And the fruits of such obedience are beautifully laid out by Pope Paul VI, when he writes:

...discipline imbues love with a deeper human meaning. Although [self control] requires continuous effort, it also helps the spouses become strong in virtue and makes them rich with spiritual goods. And this

virtue fosters the fruits of tranquility and peace in the home and helps in the solving of difficulties of other kinds. It aids spouses in becoming more tender with each other and more attentive to each other. It assists them in dispelling that inordinate self-love that is opposed to true charity. It strengthens in them an awareness of their responsibilities. And finally it provides parents with a sure and efficacious authority for educating their children. As their children advance through life they will come to a correct appreciation of the true goods of Man and employ peacefully and properly the powers of their mind and senses.

Dear friends, these are beautiful promises, but they are promises based on the truth of God, and therefore, they can and do come true. Not without difficulty, as Pope Paul reminds us, nor “without the help of God, who upholds and strengthens the good will of men.”

May this conference, may the efforts of all who have joined in planning and attending it, may the example that you, our Catholic husbands and wives, set by the way you live your own marriages, and above all, may the help of God we constantly implore, reinvigorate in our local Church an awareness and appreciation for the great gift of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI’s finest and most enduring effort on behalf of the People of God, the Holy Catholic Church.

And may the fruits of tranquility and peace, harvested in your hearts and your homes, by surrendering to the sharp sweetness of God’s law, bring new life, new compassion, and new wisdom to the world around us.

This we pray, in our Lord’s name. Amen.

Most Reverend Archbishop John F. Donoghue