

“To Serve Human Life is to Serve God”

(Pope Francis)

A Pastoral Message for New Year 2018

From

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My brothers and sisters, as 2018 begins, I wish you, your family and all your loved ones the gifts of hope, love, and ‘life to the full’ in the New Year.

On 1st January this year, the Feast of the Motherhood of Mary, Pope Francis said that calling Mary, *“Mother of God”* reminds us that, in Jesus, God became a living human being. God is therefore intimately close to humanity - as close as a child is to its mother in the womb.

This is miraculous, Pope Francis said, *“Human beings are no longer alone”*. God is with us. In *“the frail and infant God resting in his mother’s arms”*, we see a *“reflection of ourselves”* and realise that *“humanity is precious and sacred to the Lord”*.

Human life is sacred

All human life is sacred. All human life is precious. This is why the direct and intentional taking of innocent human life is always gravely wrong. In his New Year Homily, Pope Francis teaches us that: *“to serve human life is to serve God. All life, from life in the mother’s womb to that of the elderly, the suffering and the sick, and to that of the troublesome and even repellent, is to be welcomed, loved and helped”*.

Just before Christmas the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution submitted its report to the Oireachtas. In the name of ‘modernising healthcare’, the Committee proposes a very liberal abortion regime, including unrestricted access to abortion up to twelve weeks, and, thereafter during pregnancy, very broad grounds for abortion and access to abortion.

In the coming weeks, Oireachtas members will be discussing the possibility of holding a referendum aimed at repealing Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution of Ireland. This Article - the eighth amendment - gives an undertaking to respect, defend and vindicate the equal right to life of a mother and her unborn child. Article 40.3.3 reads as follows:

“The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right”.

Article 40.3.3 is a declaration of equality and respect for human life – it represents, at the very foundations and substructure of our laws, a conviction that all human life is equally worth cherishing. To repeal this Article will leave unborn children defenceless, and completely at the mercy of whatever abortion laws are introduced in Ireland - both immediately, and as will inevitably be further broadened in future years.

Two Lives, One Love!

Today we celebrate Nollaig na mBan, an Irish tradition which marks the contribution that women make to our families and to society. Women’s lives are precious, to be loved, valued and protected. Their babies’ lives are precious, to be loved, valued and protected. Two lives, one love! Both lives deserve protection from the tragedy and irreversible decision of abortion.

It is falsely claimed that wide access to abortion will mark Ireland out as a ‘modern’ country, placing the needs of women ‘at the centre’. Abortion ends the human life of an unborn girl or boy. It deceives women - and men - by creating a culture where the decision to end the life of an unborn child is portrayed as simply a matter of individual ‘choice’.

Since the introduction of the 1967 Abortion Act in Britain there have been almost nine million abortions. One-in-five pregnancies in Britain end in abortion; one-in-four in Sweden. International experience shows a similar trend elsewhere. Are these the so-called ‘modern abortion regimes’ that Ireland is seeking to emulate?

When women are in crisis during pregnancy, feeling frightened or isolated, they need to know they are not alone. A woman facing such a crisis deserves time, compassion, meaningful support and life-affirming alternatives to abortion and its harmful legacy. Our ambition as a people should be to guarantee genuine care for pregnant mothers, encourage responsible support from fathers, and to truly cherish all children equally.

We should focus our energies and resources on making Ireland the most welcoming country in the world for a woman and her baby in the womb. Our doctors, nurses, midwives and other care professionals have already helped to earn Ireland's place as one of the safest countries in the world for mothers and their babies during pregnancy. Ireland now has an opportunity to give even stronger witness that: we value all life equally; we care for the weakest and smallest, the strongest and healthiest, the youngest, the oldest, and the whole wonderful and beautiful spectrum of life in-between.

Intervention

Regarding medical intervention, Catholic teaching is clear: where a seriously-ill pregnant woman requires medical treatment which may put the life of her baby at risk, such treatments are ethically permissible provided every effort is made to save both the mother and her baby. Such an intervention would be different to an abortion, which is the direct and intentional taking of the innocent life of the unborn.

Be missionaries for life!

The innate dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death, is a value for the whole of society, rooted in reason as well as in faith. The Catholic Church, in common with many other people of goodwill, teaches that ending the life of an unborn child, like the taking of any other innocent human life, is always evil and can never be justified.

Brothers and sisters I encourage you to be missionaries for the cause of life. Remember those words of Pope Francis: *"To serve human life is to serve God"*. Speak to your families, your children and grandchildren, friends and colleagues about cherishing the precious gift of life at all times from conception to natural death. Speak the truth about life, and speak it with love. Despite the strong pressures to remain silent, do not be afraid to witness to the equality of all life in private conversations and public discussions in the coming months. As citizens committed to the Common Good, you have a democratic right to make your views known, respectfully, to our public representatives.

The power of prayer

Please pray earnestly with me that Ireland will 'choose life' and that the lives of all women and their unborn children will always be loved, valued, welcomed and respected in this country.

Prayer of Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'*)

**All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.**

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

That we may protect life and beauty.

**Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.**

Amen