

abortion

WHAT EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW

“God’s love does not differentiate between the newly conceived infant still in his or her mother’s womb and the child or young person, or the adult and the elderly person.” ~ Pope Benedict XVI¹

Catholic teaching on abortion is rooted in the recognition that the dignity of the human person begins at conception and flows through life until we face the end of our earthly journey. Respect for human life includes responding in charity to all those suffering a loss after an abortion.

Unwavering Stance

From its earliest days, the Church understood each person’s inherent dignity. A document commonly referred to as *The Didache*, or “The Teaching” [of the Twelve Apostles], dated between the first and second century, states “You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.” Other early Church figures, including St. Ambrose and St. Augustine (4th and 5th centuries, respectively), attest to the dignity of human life in the womb. More recently, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes, “From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life” (no. 2270). The Church continues Her affirmation of life in all that she does: by Her efforts to educate, care for the poor, the sick, and outreach to the marginalized. This consistent care for humanity lies at the heart of the Catholic Christian faith. It is with this longstanding commitment to life in mind that we are all called to strive for “... a society capable of recognizing the dignity of every person” regardless of one’s stage of life (Pope Francis to the United Nations, October 20, 2016).

No Small Matter

The Guttmacher Institute reports that, “Twenty-one percent of all pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) in 2011 ended in abortion...” equating to approximately 1,060,000 abortions.

In comparison, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention list the leading causes of death in 2011 as heart disease (596,577) and cancer (576,691). This means that if fetal death by induced abortion was included in the CDC’s data from 2011, **abortion represents about 30% of all deaths in the US in 2011** while heart disease and cancer account for 16.6% and 16.1%, respectively.

Every human being is inestimably valuable. As privileged creatures of God, He has created us in His very “image and likeness” (Gn 1:26), unlike any other beings in existence. Furthermore, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself “once for all” (Heb 10:10), affirms human dignity. There has never been, and never will be, a human person for whom Christ did not offer Himself. God’s unfathomable sacrifice, God who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16), shows us just how much we are worth. Our dignity, then, is not about what we can or cannot do. Rather, our dignity is about what God has already done; it flows from our unique relationship with Him; it flows from the sacrifice He made for us on the Cross. This is the heart of human dignity: that God the Father has loved each and every one of us into existence.

¹Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants at the 12th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life and Congress on “The Human Embryo in the Pre-Implantation Phase”* (February 27, 2006)

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RESPONDING WITH PRAYER AND MERCY

Reconciliation and Healing

“I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God’s mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father.”

- Pope Francis, At the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, November 20, 2016

As we seek to respond in charity to the presence of legal abortion in our society, we should remember that God is constantly calling everyone back to Himself – all the faithful are invited to a renewed relationship with Jesus Christ. If we recognize that God calls everyone to amend their ways, it may help us to walk forward with our brothers and sisters whose lives have been touched by abortion, to seek healing *with* them, glad together in the fact that God and all of heaven rejoice at the return of a beloved son or daughter (cf. Lk 15:7).

Recognizing that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), the Church calls all of its members to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, asking that we approach the confessional at least once a year to confess serious sins (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no.1457). Pope Francis, himself, receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation every two weeks! Rather than a punishment, Reconciliation is referred to as a “celebration.” It is through this great Sacrament of healing that we are brought back into full communion with God and our brothers and sisters in the Church, and in a very real way, healing between God and any single member of the faithful will effect real positive change in the lives of others.

Where to Turn for Healing & Support:

If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential non-judgmental help is available. Call Project Rachel’s national toll-free number: 888-456-HOPE (-4673) or visit HopeAfterAbortion.org.

Finally, we must respond with additional prayer. All efforts must be steeped in prayer, interceding on the behalf of those affected by abortion and for an end to the “culture of death” that regards “a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care [as] useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another” (Saint John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 12).

Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe

Virgin of Guadalupe,
Patroness of unborn children,
we implore your intercession
for every child at risk of abortion.
Help expectant parents to welcome from God
the priceless gift of their child’s life.

Console parents who have lost that gift
through abortion,
and lead them to forgiveness and healing
through the Divine Mercy of your Son.

Teach us to cherish
and to care for family and friends
until God calls them home.
Help us never to see others as burdens.

Guide our public officials
to defend each and every human life
through just laws.
Inspire us all to bring our faith into public life,
to speak for those who have no voice.

We ask this in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ, who is Love and Mercy itself.
Amen.

To learn more about
Catholic teaching on abortion visit:

www.catholicnh.org/abortion