

**Reflection - Holy Hour for Life  
National Prayer Vigil for Life  
January 18, 2024**

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Thank you for your presence tonight. Thank you for spending this time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer is at the heart of what we do during these days. We pray tonight as we prepare for the march tomorrow that the Lord might use that to touch hearts and open minds to the sanctity of life.

And it's very fitting that during this time of adoration we have the rosary prayed and led so beautifully by our consecrated religious. Thank you so much for your presence here tonight. You are heralds of the risen Lord by your very consecration. You are heralds of the victory of life that Jesus has won for all of us.

And it's fitting that we pray the rosary. Mary, in all of her apparitions, always urges people to pray the rosary in a time of crisis, and it was praying the rosary that brought about the victory at Lepanto. It was praying the rosary that was instrumental in the defense of Vienna. It was praying the rosary that averted a massacre in the Philippines and brought down the Marcos dictatorship. And so, this is a beautiful and powerful prayer that our Lady has given to us and one that we must use. If you are looking for a way to reinvigorate your praying of the rosary, in the Archdiocese of Kansas City, we have a group called Holy Family School of Faith that has a daily rosary podcast. There's over a hundred thousand listeners from well over a hundred countries. Dr. Mike uses the rosary as Dominic did, as a method of catechesis, so before each mystery, he gives a little meditation on the Scriptures or the Catechism or the teaching of the Church. Feel free to look that up.

You know, this past week in our liturgical year in our daily readings, we were following the book of Samuel, and we were at that part of the transition or the appearance of David in the story of the Old Testament. It's interesting. We have this episode, Samuel anointed David, but he's a young boy. He is still young, and the Israelites are being threatened by the Philistines and this great giant, Goliath, is challenging any of their soldiers to one-on-one combat to decide this. And Saul, even though we're told that he was a very tall, imposing figure, he is frightened to fight Goliath. All of the adult soldiers of Israel say, "He is too big, we cannot possibly fight him." But it is the boy David, who cannot even wear armor, but who believes that God is with him, just as he was with him as when he was doing his shepherding. As you recall that story, David goes into battle with nothing but this slingshot with five stones. Some commentators say those five stones represent the Pentateuch and that this was, again, the heart of the Jewish faith of those five first books of the Bible. When David challenges Goliath, he takes one of those stones and successfully strikes Goliath in the forehead and brings him down and uses his own sword to conquer him.

I think that image is apt for us where we are right now in the pro-life movement. The forces that we are facing can seem so overwhelming. They can seem gigantic. They can seem like a Goliath. We are facing a billion-dollar industry which is willing to spend everything, anything to defend its livelihood: the killing of children. We have propagandized generations of children, now young adults, through our public education, through higher education, through the mainstream media, and through the entertainment industry. We have all of these. Bishop Burbidge referred to that tonight, if we were offered all of those things, but what we have is something even more powerful. It is Jesus and his truth. And we can feel overwhelmed and discouraged that the enemy is too big. What can we do? But we have something stronger and more powerful than even the Torah of the Old Testament. We have Jesus Christ. Gene Garten, God rest her soul, used to often close her reflections with referring to this Biblical image. She said the soldiers of Israel looked at Goliath and said, "He is too big, we cannot fight him," but David looked at him and said, "He's so big, how can I miss him?" I think we have to have that same attitude, that with the Lord on our side, we will conquer. We will prevail.

It is so important that we're in this year of Eucharistic revival within our Church here in the United States, and I'm so glad that we have added this time of the adoration as part of our vigil preparation. The Eucharist is this incredible miracle that God has given to us. When I first came to Kansas City, it was a hot August day. We had 10 below temperatures last week, but in the summer, we

get 100 degrees plus, and naturally, that is the day the air conditioning goes off. There was a repairman who came to my residence and he and I struck up a conversation. He said to me at one point, "Archbishop, I was raised a Methodist, my wife and I go to an Evangelical church but," he said, "I consider myself more Catholic than Protestant." I said, "Really? Why do you say that?" And he said, "Well, first of all, my wife and I have 10 children." I said, "Wow. Thank you for your openness to life." But then he said, "But even more than that, I believe what you believe about the Eucharist. I don't know how my brothers and sisters can read the sixth chapter of John and not believe that Jesus Christ is truly present." I said, "Wow, you should be Catholic." He has not signed up for RCIA or OCIA yet, but next time the air conditioning breaks down, we have another opportunity to discuss.

If you read that sixth chapter of John's Gospel that is often titled the Bread of Life discourse, it is right after the part in John's Gospel when it's the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish, and the crowds are pursuing him. They want him to give them this physical bread, but Jesus says, no, that is not why I have come. He says in that sixth chapter, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst." He says, "I am the bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever, and the bread I shall give you is for the life of the world." He says, "Truly, truly" (whenever Jesus says truly, truly, it's something very important that he's saying), "I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you, but he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." Jesus says, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." This is Jesus' own description of what the Eucharist is. Of course, even his disciples had no idea what he was talking about at that point, and we are told in that sixth chapter that this was a hard saying and people found it too hard to listen to. We are told that after this, many of the disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. What does Jesus do? He does not say, I was just speaking metaphorically. These were just symbols I was talking about. Please come back. No. He turns to the apostles, and he says to them, "Are you going to leave as well?" And this is one of Peter's shining moments. Again, Peter doesn't really know what we know about the Eucharist at this point, but he knows who Jesus is and he says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have come to believe and come to know that you are the holy one of God." It would be at the Last Supper and after Calvary that Peter would finally begin to understand the meaning of those words.

The Church is calling us here in the United States to open our hearts to this miracle of the Eucharist. To me, it is so encouraging to see our young people's love for the Eucharist and adoration. We have a youth camp in Kansas, and it is a wonderful place. They do great catechesis there, and when I go and visit during the summer, I'll ask our young people, "You have all sorts of outdoor activities. What's your favorite thing about camp?" About half of them will say to me, "Our time in adoration." And maybe many of them just as young children will have profound encounters as they pray in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord.

I was at the SEEK conference and one of the highlights of that is the time of adoration. This happens at the Steubenville conferences and so many other times. I love that our young people are being drawn to our Eucharistic Lord. But of course, it is not only for young people. We need our older people to be witnesses. I grew up in St. Louis. My father died when my mother was pregnant with me. She was a single mom, and she was a Catholic schoolteacher. My brother and I were both in high school at different schools. She would get up at 5:30 in the morning to go to Mass at one of our neighboring churches and then she'd come back and fix breakfast for us. Sometimes that was the only meal we would have together that day. We would get off to our schools, but she would go to 8:00 Mass with her students. She said she had to go to that 5:30 mass because she couldn't really focus on the miracle of the Eucharist. At 8:00, she had to pay attention to what her students were doing. My grandfather and grandmother lived downstairs, and he was an important father figure to me. It always intrigued me that on Saturday morning at 2:00 a.m., he would go to our parish church and spend an hour in adoration. And so I say this to our older adults: be conscious of that. Your children are watching. They're watching for what's most important to you.

Sometimes people will say, well, really? Can God, can Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, really be present in what appears to be just a simple piece of unleavened bread? But really, it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus, who became an embryo in the womb of Mary, who was born in the humble circumstances of Bethlehem, who grew up in this small obscure village of Nazareth, who spent most of his adult life as a laborer, a carpenter, who experienced his public ministry in a small geographic area that was considered by worldly powers at the time as insignificant, who went to Jerusalem to give his life on

Calvary, enduring his humiliating and excruciating passion and death. Why? So that you and I would know the depth of God's love, that you and I would know our own dignity and the dignity of every other human being, both born and unborn; that we are of such worth that a God died for us.

This is really at the heart of the Gospel of life. St. John Paul says that, in the Gospel of life, that the ultimate worth of each and every human life, no matter what age or stage of development, no matter what our capacities, intellectual or physical, that we're of such worth that God gave his life on Cavalry for us. It's beautiful that God has given us this incredible gift. We shouldn't be surprised that he who humbled himself to become an embryo, to be born in Bethlehem, would figure out a way to make himself present to us through all time and would do it in very humble appearances: a piece of bread and a cup of what was wine.

My good friends, we need to pray here in the presence of the Eucharist and ask Jesus, the Lord of life, to give us the strength to have courage to stand and hold out for the witness of the sanctity of life, as Bishop Burbidge said to us tonight, to have the courage to stand for truth. We need to pray for the wisdom to have the words but, more importantly, to live in a way that will touch the minds and open the hearts of others to know the dignity of each and every human person. We need to ask for this love, this burning love to surround mothers, (so many of you are involved in this ministry, with care and support, to empower them to choose life), to ask us to rescue with love those whom we cannot at this time protect by the law.

Our Catholic faith is such a gift. No other faith believes what we Christians believe: in this God who has pursued us and sought us out, who immersed himself into our human condition and who has found a way to make himself present to us through all-time. Let us worship him, let us give this God with all our hearts thanksgiving for his amazing love for us and ask him to help us to be those missionary disciples that Pope Francis talks about, missionary disciples of his Gospel and especially his Gospel of life. Amen.