

2024 March for Life Basilica Mass Homily Transcript

Delivered by: Bishop Michael F. Burbidge

Dear friends in Christ: I begin with words of thanks. Looking out at all of you here today, I see the zeal, perseverance, and love that drives your commitment to the pro-life cause, and I am inspired. Thank you for remaining dedicated to this vitally important work, for the sacrifices you made to offer prayer, witness, and advocacy today and tomorrow in our nation's capital on behalf of the unborn, and for your tireless efforts to bring pro-life ministries to communities around the country. On behalf of my brother bishops throughout the United States, I offer my sincere thanks.

If there is one lesson we learn time and again from Scripture, it is this: *The end of the story has not yet come.* Every time there is a victory to celebrate, we discover there is still more work to be done. Noah and his family were spared in the great flood. And yet, almost instantly, sin crept back into the picture. The story isn't over; God still has work to do in the hearts of his people. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and rescued them. But the Israelites grew weary and despaired. They turned from God and fell into sin. Once again, God's work is not complete. David slayed a great giant and won victory on the battlefield. But in the depths of his own heart, sin remained. He committed grave evil against Uriah. David is a great king. But he is no redeemer. The story hasn't ended. There is still work to be done.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us: "*Behold I am with you always until the end of the age.*" He speaks these words after his preaching ministry, after his suffering and death, resurrected and appearing to his friends before he ascends to Heaven. The work of redemption is complete. It seems, for a moment, that the story is over. But it's not. The work of spreading the Gospel, of sharing the gift of redemption, has only just begun. We call this Gospel "the great commission." To be sure, the disciples are being sent, but they are not being sent alone. Instead, Jesus' words constitute a profound promise: "*Behold I am with you always until the end of the age.*" He knows — far better than they — that the work will be difficult, frustrating, and often discouraging. But his words are not mere comfort. They are a promise. Go forth, you will not be alone.

Jesus' promise is critical, not least because these words carry another meaning too. They are words of warning. The perfection we so long for, Jesus subtly reminds his followers, will not be ours until the end of the age. Even as we work to bring God's goodness and justice here and now, we will be frustrated. Our best laid plans will sometimes fail. The good works we accomplish will not always last. Sin will creep in. Human weakness will surface. We will lose sight of what is most important and be distracted by worldly aims. Pride will take us away from Christ. Our victories here on Earth are fragile.

But that is why Christ's words for us today are so critical: "*I am with you always until the end of the age.*" They are an instruction for how to live in this broken world — how to

bring goodness to it, even as it persists in imperfection. *The answer — the only answer — is Christ himself.* Christ speaks these words, not as an assurance that all our efforts will succeed by worldly metrics, but as a promise that he will be there in our successes and our failures, in our victories and our losses, in our moments of elation and our moments of bitter discouragement. *And he will sanctify it all.*

For many of us, the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* was a moment of relief, a moment of new life, an exodus from the oppression under which we lived for 50 years. If the past year and a half has taught us anything, it is this: *Dobbs is not the end. It is a victory — a tremendous victory — but not a decisive one.* The lives of the unborn are still in danger — in some places, more so than ever. The lives of innocent children are being taken. Mothers are still being harmed. Couples, children, and families are still in need of resources, support, and love.

Despite the tireless efforts and hard work of bishops and all the faithful, we suffered a particularly difficult loss for unborn life after Dobbs when several states enshrined abortion rights with radical amendments to their state constitutions. In addition, Catholic politicians and intellectuals tragically continue to publicly endorse abortion as though it is a “right” and advocate for pro-abortion policies. The current administration has removed safety protocols on the distribution of abortion pills, endangering women’s health and making vulnerable women more susceptible to coercion and abuse.

With these defeats, we have learned important lessons. Money is flooding in to help our opponents tell falsehoods, to deceive people, and to portray anyone who stands up for life as irrational, radical, and intolerant. Our opponents are also supported by the media and public relations strategists. But what if someone said, “You can have all that too: money, media, and consultants to spin a false narrative, OR you can have the Truth.” What do you want? I know what our answer would be every single time. And the Truth we have! Yet, we must find new ways of communicating it. How? Without compromise. Where? Even in the darkest places...through service and always with Christ at the center.

Communicate the Truth in love and without compromise. Before Easter last year, my little grandniece and grandnephew visited me, and as was customary I took them to their favorite store to buy their Easter gifts. However, based on the experience of the previous year, I told them I needed to teach them a new word: “budget.” After my explanation, my grandnephew said, “I have a word to teach you: ‘negotiation.’” He actually knew what it meant. I said to him, “No negotiations.” We say the same today. Some issues allow for no negotiations because they are and will always be true. All of human life is sacred. The right to life is absolutely fundamental. No one has a right to directly take the life of another. No one has a right to devalue another. No one has a right to say which lives are worth saving and worth living, and which lives are not. We live in a world where some, including those elected to the highest offices, sadly neglect these basic truths and/or want to compromise or negotiate with them. And it is our sacred duty to vigorously and

tirelessly defend them. *At the same time, our deepest victory as a movement lies in responding in the only way worthy of the human person: in love.*

Communicate the Truth even in the darkest places.

We must continue to be strategic in states where there are victories to be won. In other places, where states have acted to enshrine extreme abortion policies into law, we must not lose hope. Even in the darkest places, we can be a light. Like Jesus, it is not enough to reserve our message for those who will readily receive it, and to pursue victories only in those places where we are likely to win. We must persist in those places where our message is rejected. We must bring light to the darkest corners. For “every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ,” Pope Francis says. Every life that is saved is loved by God and endowed with inviolable dignity. *Every life is worth the effort.*

More than anything, we must continue to serve, as the theme for the 2024 March for Life reminds us: *With every mother, for every child.* The needs of mothers and babies are dynamic, and we must be dynamic too. The work we do in pregnancy centers around the country is at the center of our mission. We must fortify those efforts and ensure that those who choose life have a home, an income, food, clothing, and provisions for their children. We must help mothers and fathers through the challenges of pregnancy and welcoming a new life. Becoming parents or growing a family often comes with a need for greater emotional and spiritual support. We must be attuned to this need, and creative in how we respond to it.

We cannot negotiate the truth; we must bring light, even to the darkest places, and we must serve generously. But in all of this, we must, above all, *keep Christ at the center* of all we do. Because, in spite of our best efforts, things will only go our way some of the time. Laws will come and go. There will be moments of victory; there will be moments of defeat. We will feel elated, and we will feel discouraged. Political views and public opinion will change. But Jesus Christ will not. “*Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever,*” St. Paul says. Alone, our efforts will be frustrated. We will succumb to discouragement. We will be frustrated by setbacks and tempted by despair. But with Christ at the center, we will learn the truth of what it means to live in hope, rooted in the Lord’s promises: “*Behold, I make all things new...and I am with you always until the end of the age.*”

Our own efforts will always be imperfect and incomplete. There will always be more work to be done — more just laws to attempt to pass, more families to assist, more hearts to change. A perfect world will never arrive, our faith teaches. Perfect justice will never be ours until we find it with our Lord in Heaven. That is what it means to live in a fallen world, in this valley of tears. But it is also what it means to live in hope. When we place our trust in Christ — and not ourselves — we remember that he has promised us every good thing — perfect justice, perfect love, perfect joy — not here and now, but in the life to come. For us, and for those we serve.

As we await that longed for day, we have the opportunity to taste what is to come here and now in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. "*Behold I am with you always,*" is Jesus' promise to us too. It is a promise he fulfills every minute of every day in every tabernacle in the world. It is a promise he fulfills in your own heart every time you receive him at the altar and adore him in the Blessed Sacrament as you will do at this Mass and throughout the Vigil tonight. In his presence, be quiet. Be calm. Be still and listen to him.

God's work is not finished. Our story is not over. *Dobbs* was a great victory, and for that we must rejoice. But a new chapter is unfolding in our pro-life work. We must never negotiate the Truth, but speak it in love, bring it to the darkest places, and continue to serve mothers, fathers, and families in need. We must find our bearings and press forward in hope.

As we seek to revitalize our pro-life work, to find new ways to bring our message to the world, and to win anew the hearts of our fellow citizens, we must remember to put Christ at the center of all that we do, the One who teaches us what it means to be advocates for life, to love persons without restraint — *Christ, who remains with us, who loves and heals us that we might love and heal others, the One who promises: "Behold I make all things new...and I am with you always until the end of the age."* To him be glory and power forever and ever.