

IT IS TIME TO CALL A SPADE A SPADE

Archbishop Chaput gave a talk to the Pro-Life leaders in Harrisburg on September 28. Much of his talk formed the basis for my homily.

For the past 43 years we've been living the consequences of Roe v Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively legalized abortion on demand. And the abortion struggle of the past four decades teaches us a very useful lesson. Evil talks a lot about "tolerance" when it's weak. When evil is strong, real tolerance gets kicked out the door. This explains a lot about our current cultural climate. To put it simply: Evil cannot bear the counter-witness of truth. It cannot co-exist peacefully with goodness, because evil insists on being seen as right, and worshiped as being right. Therefore, the good must be made to seem hateful and wrong. The very existence of people who refuse to accept evil and who seek to act virtuously burns the conscience of those who don't. And so, quite logically, people who march and lobby and speak out to defend the unborn child will be – and are – reviled by political leaders and news media and abortion activists who turn the right to kill an unborn child into a shrine for personal choice.

Seventy years ago, abortion was a crime against humanity. Four decades ago, abortion supporters talked piously about the "tragedy" of abortion and the need to make it safe and rare. But not today. Not anymore. Now abortion is not just a so-called "right," but a right that claims positive dignity, the license to demonize its opponents and the precedence to interfere with actual and real constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly and religion. As a nation we no longer tolerate abortion. We celebrate it. We venerate it as a totem. We bow before its power.

Our lives matter not because of who we are. They matter because of who God is. His mercy, his justice, his love – these are the things that move the galaxies and reach into the womb to touch the unborn child with the grandeur of being human. And we become more truly human ourselves by seeing the humanity in the poor, the weak, the elderly and the unborn child -- and then fighting for it. Over the past 43 years, those who are prolife have been written off as defeated and finished too many times to count. Yet here we still are disappointing our critics and refusing to die. And why is that? It's because no court decision, no law and no political lobby can ever change the truth about when human life begins and the sanctity that God attaches to each and every human person, born or unborn. Human beings make mistakes and sometimes babies result but God never makes a mistake when he sends a little one. Never.

The Archbishop went on to say: As I was gathering my thoughts for this talk, a line from Psalm 89 came back to me again and again: "[Lord,] make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart." The time we have in this world is brief. The choices we make have real substance – precisely because we come this way in life only once, and the world will be better or worse for our passing.

We have to enshrine our convictions about what is truly worthwhile and to be protected in our laws. We make sexual assault illegal -- even though we know it will still sometimes tragically occur -- because it's gravely evil. It's an act of violence, and the law should proscribe it. Of course, we also have a duty to improve the social conditions that can breed domestic and sexual violence. But that doesn't change the need for a law. Likewise, if we really believe that abortion is an intimate act of violence, then we can't aim at anything less than ending abortion. It doesn't matter that some abortions have always occurred, and that some abortions will always occur. If we really believe that abortion kills a developing, human life, then we can never be satisfied with mere "reductions" in the body count.

The Archbishop spoke about some of the things we shouldn't do and I will put them in my column for next week but here are a few things he encourages us to do.

Here's the first and most important thing to do. It's very simple: Stand up for what you believe. Do become martyrs. Be ready and willing to pay a price for your beliefs. In today's world, we may never be asked to shed our blood in witnessing for our faith. But we do see character assassinations, mud-slinging and lies against good people

every day in the public media. And we should be ready to bear the cost. Nothing, not even our good name, should stop us from doing what we know to be right.

Here's the second do. Keep hope alive. Cultivating a spirit of joy is not an act of self-deception. It's a way to acknowledge that God is on our side, and that human nature, created by God and despite the damage of original sin, is also on our side. Nothing is more inspiring than happy warriors. I've never in my life seen a joy-filled pro-abortion event. And I've always found that to be very instructive.

Here's the third thing we can do. Be strategic. Being sheep in the midst of wolves doesn't mean we can also be dumb as rocks. Pro-life organizations are always outspent by pro-abortion forces. Our efforts are dwarfed by their money. We rarely have their access to friendly media, foundations and circles of power. But this can be a blessing disguised as a curse. It forces us to be creative, long-term thinkers and resourceful with our modest means. Being strategic means planning ahead, working together and outsmarting our adversaries. To achieve these goals, we need a big dose of realism. We should never dream or whine about all the things we could do with the millions of dollars we don't have. We need to focus on the real dollars we do have. Two fish and five loaves of bread, well invested – in other words, given to the Lord -- fed a multitude. History shows that guerrilla wars, if well planned and methodically carried out, can defeat great armies. And we should never forget that the greatest “guerrilla” leader of them all wasn't Mao Zedong or Che Guevara, but a young shepherd named David, who became a king of Israel.

Here's the fifth and final thing to do. Remember that renewing the culture is our ultimate goal, not gaining power. Culture is everything. Culture is our “human ecology.” It's the environment where we human beings breathe not only air, but ideas, beliefs and values. Getting political power has its short-term value. But it's not what those who truly love life are finally about. Our real task, and our much longer-term and more important goal, is to carry out what the late Pope John Paul II called the “evangelization of culture.” We need to work to change the culture. And that demands a lifelong commitment to education, formation and, ultimately, conversion. Only genuinely holy persons really change the world. And therein lies our ultimate victory:

If we change one heart at a time, while we save one unborn life at a time, the day will come when we won't need to worry about saving babies, because they'll be surrounded by a loving and welcoming culture. Will I see that day with my own eyes? I don't think I can hold my breath that long. But then I never expected to see a Pope from Argentina or the fall of the Iron Curtain either. We may not see that day in our own lifetimes, but the children of your grandchildren will. The future depends on our choices and actions right here, right now, today -- together.

Your commitment to human life on this Respect Life Sunday when we celebrate and respect all life from conception to natural death—and beyond, matters eternally, because some lives will be lived only because your voice at the decisive moment for a young mother made them possible. So no matter how tired you get, no matter how hard the work becomes, no matter who praises you or who condemns you, the only thing that finally matters is this: God is good; he never abandons his people; and because of his love, and because of the witness of people like you, the future is ours. And the best is yet to come. Long live Jesus Christ Our Lord and Giver of Life!