

## **The Need for a New Witness**

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I am honored to have been invited by Archbishop Carlson and Legatus to address you this morning. I thank all of you for the love you have for Christ and his Church.

You may know that before I ventured off to seminary, I worked for several years as an engineer. One of my sisters, who works in marketing for Alcoa, sent me this little story several years ago:

*A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman below.*

*He yelled: "Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am!"*

*The woman below replied: "You are in a hot air balloon hovering about 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees north latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees longitude."*

*"You must be an engineer," said the balloonist."*

*"I am," replied the woman, "How did you know?"*

*"Well," answered the man, "everything you told me may be technically correct, but have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is, I am still lost. Frankly, you have not been much help so far."*

*The woman responded, "You must be in management!"*

*"I am!" replied the balloonist, "but how did you know?"*

*"Well," said the woman, "you don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are by a large quantity of*

*hot air. You made a promise you have no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is, you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my fault."*

I thought of that story as I prepared for this address. I want to share my words with you not from the stance of an engineer or a manager; rather, I share these thoughts with you as a fellow Christian and as a shepherd. I hope to share some useful information with you, and do so as a brother in Christ, to offer some insight into how we, together, can move into the future. I hope I can offer some thoughts and insights that can help us all, because the witness of all the members of the body of Christ is essential for its mission to bear fruit. Hopefully, I can offer something that you will find helpful in your life and vocation.

I want to begin my remarks this morning by referencing two of my favorite saints: John the Baptist and Thomas More. Each of these saints is different, as all of us are different and unique. John and Thomas were men of different times and cultures, habits and sensibilities. They emerged from very different vocations: John, called from the womb to be the forerunner of Christ; Thomas, a skilled layman and scholar of the law, Chancellor of England, as well as a husband and father.

But, for all their differences, there are also remarkable similarities. The first similarity is that they were both martyrs: They died witnessing to the faith. Not only this, they were martyred in the same fashion: Both were beheaded by a king, and to take it a step further, a king whose name begins with the letter "H," as in Herod and Henry.

Another similarity, and the one I wish to focus on mostly, is that an aspect of the truth these two saints were willing to suffer and lose their heads for was the truth about sex and marriage. Recall the events preceding St. John the Baptist's arrest. In the account of St. Mark's Gospel we are told, "For Herod had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him" (Mk 6:17-19). Well, we all know that she eventually got her chance, and took full advantage of it.

We also recall the events surrounding St. Thomas More's imprisonment in the Tower of London, for refusing to publicly endorse King Henry VIII's claim to be the head of the Church in England. But the events that precipitated this move of King Henry involved the matter of his marriage and divorce and remarriage, and Henry's rejection of the Church's judgment about that first marriage. St. Thomas refused to compromise the dictates of his conscience and sanction Henry's divorce and remarriage, or his claim to be the head of the Church in England. Like St. John, he was beheaded.

Both men were willing to die rather than violate their consciences. Both were willing to die for the sake of one single marriage, and another's marriage at that; in fact, the marriages of the men who would kill them!

I begin with these examples from the past because they speak with great relevance to the times we live in. We are faced on several fronts with threats: to human life, yes; but now also to the family itself, and to marriage, its foundation. The Catholic Church is hated by many of the aggressive secularists of today, and hate is not too strong a word. If you doubt me, read the comments at the bottom of articles posted on the internet that are related to the Catholic Church. One of the sources for this animosity can be identified as the same cause for Herodias' hatred for St. John, and King Henry's hatred for St. Thomas. They spoke the truth about sex and marriage. The Church continues this witness, often in the face of great ridicule and opposition. But, even more than this, the Church speaks of truths, of matters that human beings have not the authority to alter or do away with.

Marriage, sex, love, and human life are intimately connected. They are at the heart of the human experience and are essential to our vocation and dignity. They also have an essential sign value in that they point to God; they reveal something of God, which is why we are so intent and tenacious in defending them. These things really matter!

Marriage and the family it creates are given and ordered by God, with a truth which is constitutive to them. We can see and know this truth by human reason and "plain ole common sense," which is why cultures from all ages before ours, from different religious settings, were able to acknowledge the true nature of marriage. Of course, there are deviations to this, but wherever the Church has taken root she has purified the culture and restored marriage to the state that it was "in the beginning."

We should remember that the struggles we face to defend human life, marriage and family, and the like are not new. The Roman Empire was not exactly supportive of these. I am always struck by one of the selections from the *Office of Readings* that we had just a few weeks ago on Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter. It is from a document entitled, *Letter to Diognetus*, which was written around the end of the second century, and describes Christians of that time. There is a section of the letter that reads: “Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. . . And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. . . Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives. They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh.” Why were they so remarkable? Because they valued human life, marriage, chastity; and they stood out in a culture that did not value these things. And eventually, Christians changed the culture.

The truths about marriage and sex, love and life, are confirmed and deepened by divine revelation. God reveals truth, too, often truth that we could not know by reason alone. The Church loves and hands on truth from both of these sources – reason and revelation – because they both come from the same source: God. And bishops in particular are called to be “witnesses of [the] divine and catholic truth” as the Second Vatican Council teaches in *Lumen Gentium* (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 25).

These truths are important for purely social reasons: They make for a stable society, they prove the best way for children to be conceived and raised, and they contribute to the common good, among other things. But, beyond these good reasons, we Christians recognize that marriage and sex reveal something about God and ourselves as creatures made in his image.

Marriage, and the sexual love that expresses and renews the marriage covenant, manifest an enfleshed, incarnational love, and transmit life. In its own way, every time a husband and wife renew their marriage bond sexually, we can truly say, similarly to the inspired word in the Prologue of St. John’s Gospel, “the word became flesh” (Jn 1:14) The couple’s “fiat,” the “yes” of the wedding day that brought about the marriage of the couple in their vows, expressing their total gift of self—that word becomes flesh in the one-flesh union. We are reminded by sacred Scripture that the one-flesh union of a husband and wife is an icon of the “deeper mystery” of Christ’s

love for the Church (cf. Eph 5). Blessed Pope John Paul II spoke similarly to this one flesh union, and the family that is created with the child, as a kind of icon of another mystery, that of the Blessed Trinity. In order to uphold our own dignity and that of others, we have to be faithful to these truths. To betray these truths is to follow the path of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and take to ourselves a power reserved to God. As with our first parents, eating of this fruit yields “thorns and thistles”—and death. We see this verified in the vast, intractable social ills of the modern Western world.

But, while the opposition and even hatred of some from outside the Church is, to some extent, to be expected, what is truly saddening is that much of the opposition to the truth comes from *within* the Church, and this is where I wish to speak frankly to all of you and issue a friendly challenge, again, not as an engineer or a manager, but as a fellow Christian and a shepherd.

It is easy for us to shine light on the darkness that is the culture of death embodied in the abortion industry. What is difficult, and painful, is looking at how we Catholics have in part, enabled the culture of death to gain a foothold. To some extent, the lukewarmness and infidelity of the household of God has enabled the culture of death to make inroads. We have not embraced the Gospel and its challenges in our own lives, and so we have not presented a compelling witness. We have not shown forth the light of Christ’s face to the world as effectively as we could have.

When the recent HHS mandate came out, which threatens our religious liberty, the first thing I addressed in my letter to the faithful of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau was our own responsibility for enabling such a thing to even be considered. If the Catholic faithful had received and lived by the Church’s teaching on married love, including the immorality of using artificial contraception, I’m convinced we would not be where we are today.

The administration’s boldness was rooted in an awareness that many of the faithful reject the Church’s teaching on this issue.

This morning, I will suggest two areas that can help evangelize and transform our culture if we Catholics will first embrace and live our call to holiness in fidelity to the truth. The first of these regards sex and marriage, and the second the mystery of human suffering and our response to it—mercy. These two areas are not unrelated as I hope to point out.

**I. Sex and Marriage and the Call to Fruitful Communion.** So let us return to the same issues St. John the Baptist and St. Thomas More died for: sex and marriage. Both of these are intimately linked to those two things for which we were created: life and love. We read in St. John's Gospel Jesus' words, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10); and "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

From a Christian perspective, both of these, sex and marriage, serve as windows into the inner life of God: the sexual union of husband and wife is a window into another mysterious one flesh union: that of Christ and his mystical bride, the Church. This mystery is realized in the eucharistic mystery celebrated at the Mass. We each renew our one flesh covenant union with Christ in the Eucharist.

As sex, married love, and the new life generated in the family are holy icons of the mystery of God, it is no wonder that our spiritual enemy wishes to attack and deface them. The weapon of choice is contraception. Contraception is intended to make communion fruitless—it's that simple. In marriage, this mentality portrays the child as an unwanted threat, which is why the culture refers to contraception as "protection." And, why the administration can treat pregnancy as a disease to be prevented like cancer or diabetes, to be treated under health insurance plans.

We should also realize that when a couple deliberately and intentionally sterilizes their sexual union through the use of artificial contraception, it becomes essentially like homosexual sexual relations. This is why the legalization of so-called "gay marriages" has gained so much traction. When the vast majority of married, heterosexual couples have deliberately rendered their sexual communion fruitless, when an essential purpose for the sexual union in marriage is rendered disposable and is simply regarded as optional, then arguments against same-sex unions become hollow. Marriage becomes, in the recent words of Vice President Joseph Biden, simply, "Who do you love?" The gift of generating human life and of becoming a "co-creator" are no longer essential to marriage—hence the non-necessity of male and female complementarity.

It is here that so much is at stake, and why the Catholic Church is deeply involved. It is also here that the Catholic faithful must be renewed. It is here that a portion of the new evangelization must be focused so that the good news of sex and marriage can be understood and lived. It is also here

that the Church and her witness have been weakened, and the recent controversy over the Administration's Health and Human Services mandate makes this apparent.

**Another Dimension to Consider.** But there is much more at stake than just the horizontal dimension of this truth which perhaps we can best appreciate by reflecting upon the experience of our first parents in the Garden of Eden as well as upon the Eucharist.

**Fruitfulness.** In going back “to the beginning,” as Christ did in examining the question of divorce in his defense of marriage (Mt 19:4), we should take note of the very first word God pronounces to man and woman—a command that represents our primordial vocation—be “fruitful...” (Gn 1:27). This is further reflected in God's command to them “to cultivate and care for” the garden—to make it fruitful through their communion with God and one another (Gn 2:15). With God, all communion is ordered toward fruitfulness.

**Seed.** One of the details often missed in our reading of the creation account is that prior to man's fall, he is given to eat of “every *seed-bearing* plant... and every tree that has *seed-bearing* fruit” (Gn 1:29), whereas the animals are given the green plants to eat but *without the seed* in it (Gn 1:30). I do not think that this is an unimportant detail. In fact, I think this detail represents a key to better understanding man's vocation and what was absent in their choice that was sinful.

**Seedless Communion.** What was it that was lacking in the fruit that Adam and Eve partook of that brought sterility and death instead of life? Was it not the seed of their communion with God? The first sin was an act of contraception—an attempt at communion, “to be like God” (Gn 3:5), but without the seed that makes the union fruitful and life-giving. Without the seed of communion, there can be no fruitfulness. Without the seed of divine life there is sterility and death.

**A New Reality.** As a consequence of their sin against fruitfulness, a new reality befell them which God communicated to them with the words that are echoed each Ash Wednesday—“You are dirt, and to dirt you shall return” (Gn 3:19). What God was conveying with those harsh words was man's new

reality because of his “seedless” act—not only must man now toil with much sweat and effort, as a consequence of his sin, to bring forth the fruit from the soil beneath his feet, but he also must toil and sweat to bring forth the fruit of holiness from the soil of his very being. Our call to holiness is indeed very much still the work of a gardener, for holiness is fruitfulness.

**A New Gardener.** If Adam is the first gardener, then Christ is the New Gardener. This is clear in John’s Gospel where Mary Magdalene does not recognize at first the risen Christ, thinking instead he was the gardener (Jn 20:15). Well, in a sense, she was right! And as a gardener, Jesus made fruitful the tree (Acts 5:30) that was the very image of sterility and death—the cross. And how did Christ make this tree fruitful?—through the *free, total, faithful* and *fruitful* gift of himself for love of us, even unto death. Christ became the seed that Adam and Eve had forsaken and by dying produced everlasting fruit (Jn 12:24).

**A Hard Saying.** Nearly 2,000 years separate two profoundly related teachings of our Catholic faith that speak to this gift of fruitfulness. One was taught by Christ and the other by his bride, the Church. The two teachings are the flip side of the same coin. Each speaks to one of the two reciprocal halves of the equation of spousal love. Each evoked a similar reaction from those that heard it, “This is a hard saying; who can accept it?” (Jn 6:60).

**Two Teachings.** The first represents the teaching of the Bridegroom which culminates in his sacrifice upon the cross and is repeated in every Mass with the words, “This is my Body..., This is my Blood...” In the second teaching, the Church—the bride of Christ—teaches that her own response to the Bridegroom’s gift of himself is that which spouses must also strive to imitate. And what other response can the bride give to the bridegroom’s gift, but to say, “This [too] is my body.... This [too] is my blood....,” in the measure you have given yourself to me, I desire to give myself to you.

**The Measure of the Gift.** The characteristics of spousal love that Pope Paul VI would so clearly define in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* are but those of Christ our bridegroom. The measure of his spousal gift is also the measure we too are called to give, not only within our marriages, but within our

families and in all our social relationships—to be a *free, total, faithful* and *fruitful*<sup>1</sup> gift of self.

**Christ’s Gift.** What we have received from Christ is the bridegroom’s life *freely* offered: “No one takes [my life] from me; I lay it down freely” (Jn 10:18). His gift is *total*: “This is my body.... This is my blood...” (Mt 26:26, 28). He is *faithful* (cf. Heb 3:6) even though we have been unfaithful and idolatrous. And his gift is *fruitful* and is the seed of our fruitfulness—“thirty and sixty and hundredfold” (Mk 4:20).

**Two Dimensions.** But for true fruitfulness to exist, it must begin in the vertical dimension of our relationship with Christ, the fruit of which we are then to share through the selfless gift of our self with our neighbor. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that “Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of the Eucharist.”<sup>2</sup> In this light, perhaps we can better appreciate how anything less than a *free, total, faithful* and *fruitful* gift of self is an act of contraception.

**Procreative Powers.** What is contraception then but a withholding or impeding of the procreative powers of spouses in their marital embrace. Bioethicist Fr. Tadeusz Pacholczyk offers a beautiful biological insight that reflects a deep spiritual truth. He explains how the procreative powers of a husband “are ordered and oriented towards opening [his wife’s] womb to new life” whose own procreative powers “include her ability to receive the seed.”<sup>3</sup> He further notes that a woman does not directly “open her womb” to the gift of life per se, but to her husband who unseals her womb and makes it receptive to the gift of his procreative powers.<sup>4</sup> This biological insight expresses a very important spiritually reality in our relationship with God. We do not open ourselves up directly to God per se and to his gift of new life, but to our bridegroom, Christ Jesus, whose procreative powers, in a *free,*

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, n. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007), n. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Tadeusz Pacholczyk, “On the Moral Objectionability of Human Embryo Adoption” in *The Ethics of Embryo Adoption and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. Sarah-Vaughan Brakman and Darlene Fozard Weaver (Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 2007), 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

*total, faithful and fruitful* gift of himself through the cross, opens the womb of our being to the gift of new life in God. To the degree we are open to this procreative gift of our heavenly bridegroom is the degree to which we become fruitful.

**Unitive and Procreative.** The words of Christ: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mt 19:6) applies not only to the woman and man who are joined in marriage, but also to the nuptial meaning of sexual intercourse within marriage, in which God has inseparably linked love and life; what we typically call the “unitive” and the “procreative” meanings. When we decide to remove the connection to life, we necessarily will end up with death.

If these two meanings of the marital embrace—the unitive and the procreative<sup>5</sup>—cannot be separated without introducing sterility and death, so it is true in our communion with our Heavenly Bridegroom. Jesus reminds us that fruitfulness is the condition of discipleship—“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (Jn 15:8). When we approach Christ in holy Communion then, we must remember that he desires more than union with us—he desires that it be fruitful.

**Sterility.** Perhaps now we can better understand the harsh consequences suffered upon Onan in the Book of Genesis, who “wasted his seed on the ground” (38:9) and the man in the Parable of the Silver Pieces (Mt 25:14-30) who buried in the ground the gift he had received without giving even the smallest return (v. 25). It also speaks to the first Christian sin recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (5:1-11) and the death that befalls Ananias and Sapphira as a consequence of withholding a portion of their gift to the Church that was meant to be total. These are indeed warnings of the death that is associated with voluntary sterility. We must also recall the words of Christ to the grieving women as he carried his cross to Calvary—“Do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed’” (Lk 23:28-29). Is there any doubt that we are living in such times when sterility is celebrated and fruitfulness despised?

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<sup>5</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, n. 12.

**Holiness is Fruitfulness.** Contraception then is much more than a physical act, for there is a spiritual dimension of far greater consequence. As Blessed John Paul II reminds us, “Holiness is measured according to the ‘great mystery’ in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom.”<sup>6</sup>

**Sterility is Injustice.** From what do the many injustices in the world stem? Are they not from the contraception of the gift of self—a withholding of the gift of our self to God or a preventing of His gift from being received in our heart? Are injustices not a withholding of the gift of our self to our neighbor? There is indeed much at stake with a contraceptive mentality which becomes mandated as the law of the land.

**II. Suffering and Mercy.** Here, we can speak to that second area of renewal and witness—the mystery of suffering—and our response to it which should be no less fruitful in the form of mercy.

**Joy and Hope.** I am reminded of the words that come from that great document of the Second Vatican Council whose Latin title—*Gaudium et Spes*—means “Joy and Hope” which speaks to the mystery of human suffering. “Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us.”<sup>7</sup> Apart from the fruitfulness of the Gospel we are overcome by fear.

**Fear – A Consequence of Sterility.** Looking back to the beginning we see that the immediate consequence of man’s sterile act is fear—“I hid myself... for I was afraid” (Gn 3:10). Is it any coincidence today that our society has grown so fearful? The psalmist’s words ring true here—“There they were in great fear, where no fear was” (Ps 53:6).

**The Cross—the Source of Fruitfulness.** As we stated earlier, Jesus made fruitful the tree that was the very image of sterility and death—the cross. By

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1998), n. 27

<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), n. 22.

suffering himself, Christ redeemed suffering and made it fruitful. When we offer up our sufferings with those of Christ upon the cross, our sufferings become fruitful and salvific. No wonder the world echoes the demand of those who called upon Christ in his suffering to “come down from that cross” (Mt 27:40). In effect, what they are saying is, “sterilize your gift of love.” But if St. Paul could say, “I rejoice in my sufferings” (Col 1:24), it was only because he had discovered the meaning and the joy of suffering with Christ and in sharing in the labors and fruit of the New Gardener. Indeed, our sufferings can become like the sacred vestments that are worn when we join our sacrifice to Christ’s upon the altar.

To be sure, suffering is a mystery. It is an “evil” that Job famously grappled with in his conversation with God. Job asked questions that all of us want to ask when faced with suffering. God’s answer to Job, as described by the philosopher, Peter Kreeft, is essentially Exodus 3:14, “I AM, WHO AM.”<sup>8</sup> God does not reveal or explain the mystery, but responds to the mystery with himself and his mercy.

Christians see suffering and death differently, because we see them in the light of the cross. God’s final answer to suffering and death is Jesus, his Son, on the cross. God meets suffering with mercy. We see not only that suffering and death have been defeated, but that the cross itself is now a source of human and divine fruitfulness. Our culture often does not understand this, and so we must speak to our culture in witness.

I refer to a recent example to make my point.

Last fall, in the November 15 issue of *USA Today*, there was an editorial that ran under the headline: “Will America cull people with Down syndrome?” The first paragraph in the article read as follows: “In mid-October, pregnancy as we know it forever changed in America. The company Sequenom announced that with a simple blood draw at 10 weeks of gestation, a pregnant woman can now learn with near 99% accuracy whether her fetus has Down syndrome.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Kreeft . *Three Philosophies of Life*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Skotko, “Will America cull people with Down syndrome?” *USA Today*, November 14, 2011.

The remainder of the article raised the question that will soon be answered: Will new access to information about a child's condition, such as Down syndrome, lead to the choice to abort the child before its birth? The author and his colleagues researched 3,000 families nationwide which have a Down syndrome child and found some amazing results. 99% of parents said they truly love their son or daughter with Down syndrome; 88% of the brothers and sisters of such children said they are better people because of their Down siblings. Those with Down syndrome also were surveyed: 99% are happy with their lives, and 97% are happy with who they are. One wonders if the general population would respond in such a positive way!

My sense is that this data will run into another current in modern secular culture, that which devalues some people who carry handicaps or challenges. The reality, if the statistics and our own experience are true, is that a family that gives of itself to care for a handicapped child is choosing the fruitfulness that comes from love and mercy. Love is what we are made for; that is why those siblings could say they were "better people," or perhaps it is better to describe them as *fruitful* people because that in fact is what their love is.

The prophet Isaiah gives us words that are most appropriate today in describing the culture of death: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil (5:20). This is most clear in what we could call the *alpha* and the *omega*—the beginning and the end—of the culture of death's program—*eugenics*, meaning good birth, and *euthanasia*, meaning good death. But what they call *good* is in fact sterile and deadly (Is 5:20). We hear it often said, "They would be better off dead."

We could apply this to a number of other situations in which the culture proposes an easy "solution" to the fear of suffering. Euthanasia initiatives are often marketed on ballots in this way. At the root of this approach is fear. When suffering is not seen in the light of Christ's death and resurrection, but starkly from a purely utilitarian perspective, suffering becomes the greatest evil and the weakest and infirm the targets of the culture of death's quality assurance program.

Just as Peter was tempted to draw the sword in order to defend the most innocent of all men—Christ Jesus—we, too, can be tempted in the agonies of our own Gethsemanes to draw the sword in the name of defending human dignity. But we must heed the command of Christ—"Put your sword back into its sheath" (Mt 26:52)—if death is to be truly evangelized.

The culture of death tempts our weakness to respond to suffering with escape; often the escape of death through abortion, assisted suicide. It even presents death as a form of compassion, which is why we hear euthanasia described as mercy killing and why the Hemlock society changed its name to “Compassion & Choices.” None of us though can escape being drawn near the cross and our sufferings may even place us upon it, but we must remember that Christ is there with us and he himself resisted the temptation to come down from the cross.

In response to the “solutions” of the culture of death, Catholics have an important role to play. We must consistently witness in our lives, words and actions to the culture of life. We must show another way, the way of hope, love and mercy. Our first step is to examine where we have perhaps been silent or even complicit in these matters. We must have a change of heart; in the words of the prodigal son who is sitting among the pigs, we must “come to our senses” and “return to [our] [F]ather” (Lk 15:17).

The world is converted by love, a love that is fruitful. That is where the world has always been changed. When we live under obedience to the truth, even when it is hard, or when it requires us to sacrifice and deny ourselves for the good of others, or even suffer, that is when the world is changed and death is rolled back. This is what the saints did and still do. We must not begin with a political solution or a program, but with our own conversion. When we are changed, then the world will be changed.

Blessed John Paul II reminds us, “To imitate and live out the love of Christ is not possible for man by his own strength alone. He becomes *capable of this love only by virtue of a gift received*”<sup>10</sup>—by being open to the procreative powers of our Bridegroom who makes us fruitful. As Christ, our eucharistic lord and bridegroom, is “the source and power of that complete gift of self,”<sup>11</sup> it is now possible to live our universal call to holiness<sup>12</sup> as a selfless and *fruitful* gift to God and neighbor. “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

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<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, V.

