

Pastoral Letter

From the Bishop of Killala



Pastoral Letter to the priests and people of the Diocese of Killala.

“True compassion does not marginalise anyone, nor does it humiliate and exclude; much less consider the disappearance of a person as a good thing.”

(POPE FRANCIS, JUNE 2016)

I am aware that the current debate on the 8th Amendment to the Constitution is complex, sensitive and painful for many. I offer this reflection, therefore, with respect for all concerned.

Compassion

Compassion is at the core of the Christian way of living. It expresses itself in understanding, support, care, encouragement and forgiveness. It should be at the heart of all life and especially of all pregnancies, wanted or unwanted. Speaking on compassion, Pope Francis said: "True compassion does not marginalise anyone, nor does it humiliate and exclude; much less consider the disappearance of a person as a good thing." (Address to doctors in Spain and Latin America, June 9, 2016) Compassion respects life.

Unwanted pregnancies often bring with them deeply complex and sometimes traumatic issues. As a result, the decisions facing couples, and women in particular, require a human and pastoral response which is founded on and reflects the compassion of Christ. I am deeply conscious that the lives of many people today have been touched by such a crisis. Some live to this day with deep pain as a result.

The compassion of Christ always focused on the other person and was life affirming, unlike what Pope

Francis describes as the "throwaway" culture that rejects and dismisses those who do not comply with the certain canons of health, beauty and utility." (June 9th 2016) Christian compassion cares for human life from conception to natural death. Speaking of his admiration for doctors in this regard the Pope said: "I like to bless the hands of doctors as a sign of recognition of this compassion that becomes the caress of health". (June 9th 2016).

Faith

The teaching of the Catholic Church on the sacredness of human life is clear. Human life is sacred from conception until natural death. This teaching is based on the belief that our lives have their origin in God and return to God when we die. We believe that we live our lives under God's providential love and care. At times this is difficult to understand, especially when tragedy and sorrow enter our lives. However, as Christians we believe that our lives come from and are cared for by someone greater than us; a loving God, who has given us the dignity of his adopted children and wants

all of us to discover him, live in the security of his love and return to Him. Speaking of the sacredness of human life in his most recent Letter, Pope Francis said: "Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development". (Gaudete et Exsultate.101)

Our bodies

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God's life lives in us, therefore, and because of this St Paul is able to say to us through his letter to the people of Corinth; "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God." (1 Cor.6:19-20). Filled with an awareness of this we respect the lives and the right to life of everyone; the unborn, those who do not share the values of our culture, the colour of our skin, prisoners who have forfeited the right to freedom and those condemned to death row. All of us are children of a loving God. Pope

Francis is deeply conscious of this. Again, in his recent pastoral he says: "Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery and every form of rejection." (Gaudete et Exsultate.101)

Equal

In recent centuries especially, equality has become a dominant aspiration of the human spirit. Much progress has been made in this area. In recent years, for example, legislation has been introduced in Ireland to ensure that all those who are vulnerable because of their disabilities are respected and treated equally. It is particularly difficult to accept, therefore, the proposal in the Referendum on the 8th Amendment to the Constitution which would delete the word 'equal' from the Irish Constitution and as a result, fail to support the most vulnerable in our world.



Referendum

The forthcoming referendum provides us with the opportunity to become what Pope St John Paul 11 referred to as “promoters of a new way of looking at life” (Evangelium Vitae 99). This new vision of life in Ireland would be based on respect for everyone and by everyone for themselves and for others.

During the past half century the Catholic Church in Ireland has been a leader in a host of caring initiatives such as Trocaire, Accord, Cura, the Bishops Drugs Initiative, Care for Prisoners Overseas, Towards Healing, Towards Peace etc. Since 1977 Cura has supported women, and men, who faced a crisis in a pregnancy. It has offered a listening ear, a non-judgmental attitude and support for expectant mothers and for those who had an abortion.

The Catholic Church welcomes the challenges presented to it as promoters of a new way of looking at life in Ireland today. As the Irish bishops said recently, Article 40.3.3 represents the conviction that all human life is worth cherishing equally. It guarantees the right to life of the unborn child and its mother. To repeal this Article would leave unborn children at the mercy of whatever laws might be introduced in Ireland in the future.

I invite you to pray that Ireland will continue to earnestly support and care for the right to life of the unborn child.

Bishop John.

2018.

