

## *REFLECTIONS*

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### **Bless the Mother, Kill the Child**

For several weeks at the end of each year, Catholics in America celebrate the beauty and joy of motherhood. The liturgical feasts and biblical readings describe how God instilled hope by creating life in the wombs of virgins and barren women.

On December 8, the Church honors the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She, who was destined to become the Mother of God, was conceived in the womb of her mother, Anne, free from original sin, a pure vessel to bring forth the Savior of the World.

Then, four days later, Catholics celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. On that date in 1531, the Blessed Virgin appeared to Juan Diego and imprinted on his tilma an image of herself, clothed in native garb that was adorned with Aztec pictographs identifying her as a pregnant virgin.

On both feasts and on many other days preceding Christmas, events in the lives of Mary and Elizabeth are told from the Gospel of Luke: An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah and said, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John.” Then, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus,” and continued, “behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived\* a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren.” Upon her cousin’s visit, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.’”

These descriptions of divine events are complemented by Old Testament readings from Judges, Isaiah, and Samuel: “An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman [wife of Manoah] and said to her, Though you are barren and have had no children, you will conceive and bear a son”; they named him Samson. The Lord gave King Ahaz a sign saying, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” And Hannah said to the high priest Eli, “I prayed for this child [Samuel], and the Lord granted my request.”

These narrations are preparatory to December 25, when Christians throughout the world observe the birth of Our Lord through Mary. This most solemn of holydays is liturgically celebrated for eight days, ending on its octave of January 1, which the Roman Catholic Church designates as the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. The old year thus ends with the birth of Our Savior, and a new year begins with a celebration of Mary’s motherhood.

But even as life is proclaimed, the shadow of death looms. On December 28, the Church remembers the Holy Innocents, the boys two years and younger who were ordered massacred by Herod for his fear that the Lord would be an earthly king.

Today, this heinous slaughter has been repeated daily since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. Some 60 million children in America have been destroyed before birth, exterminated by acts of their mothers' free will and abetted by an infrastructure of death. No past society in the history of the world has ever tolerated such voluntary, massive destruction of its own people.

The promotion of death is big business in the United States, with thousands of people making their living killing unborn babies. It is not compassion for a distressed mother, but money that is the driving force. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which performs more than one-third of all abortions in the nation, is abetted in its grizzly business by the federal government, having received \$544 million of taxpayer money in fiscal year 2016-17. With an outspoken advocate for abortion – sadly, a Catholic -- having been nominated to be Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, it is unlikely that federal support will decrease.

After 46 years of battling legalized abortion, pro-life efforts are bearing results. The Center for Disease Control recently reported that the number of abortions in the United States decreased 24% over the decade 2006-2015, to an historic low. However, there also is a disturbing shift from surgical abortions to medication abortions. Since the Food and Drug Administration approved RU-486, commonly known as the abortion pill, in September 2000, medication abortions have increased to one quarter of all abortions.

As abortifacients become easier to obtain – an increasing number of universities are making morning after pills available via campus vending machines -- more and more abortions will occur by simply “popping a pill.” There soon will be no need to go to an abortion clinic, face pro-life prayer warriors and counselors, possibly see graphic images or view an ultrasound picture, and undergo a surgical procedure. The woman will have less anxiety or feelings of guilt about taking a self-procured pill, as her actions will seem normal.

The pro-life movement is faced with a new significant challenge. As increasing numbers of abortions are done at earlier stages with pills, not only the hearts and minds, but the consciences of people must be formed to acknowledge the existence and dignity of the human person at the earliest stages of development and recognize the evils of abortion in all its forms. With the low level of religious observance in America – one quarter of all adults have no religious affiliation, while only 23% of Catholics attend Mass each week -- this will not be easy to achieve, but must be done.

America needs a religious revitalization. There must be an endeavor by religious and laity to live one's faith openly and fully in public, and to develop a societal reverence for life. But most importantly, there must be a concerted effort of prayer – to rededicate this nation to its patroness, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and to call upon that pregnant virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe, who has been declared Empress of the Americas. With prayer and faith, with Our Lady's intercession to her Son, the nation's culture can change, for as Our Lord assures us, “with God, all things are possible.”

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