

## **Fr. Donato Homily - Jan 20, 2019 - March for Life**

In December, one particular photo created a firestorm in the news. The photo was of a mother carrying her young daughter along our southern border while tear gas went off around her. People on both sides of the political aisle were incensed, but who was to blame was debated. Some blamed the president for his policies, others prior presidents for setting president for such action, while others blamed the border security agents, others blamed those who organized the caravan, still others blamed the gangs and new government back in Honduras, and some even blamed the mother for putting her child at risk. But no one, and I mean no one, blamed that young daughter because everyone knows that the child is innocent and that as someone who is innocent, she should not have to suffer tear gas. That is to say, everyone recognized that this young girl has an innate human dignity that, even if they disagreed about who, it had been violated by someone, and that that is a great injustice to her.

This week I and a group from the parish traveled to the March for Life in Washington, along with, depending on which news source, 100,000-600,000 people the 1973 Supreme Court decision regarding abortion. At heart is the same fundamental principle, that every human person, no matter how small, has an innate human dignity given to them by God, and that innocent people, such as unexpected child, should ever have to suffer an injustice. Whenever this topic is discussed, it is immensely sensitive because women, and the men in their lives, have made difficult choices in the past, which maybe they regret, and we cannot condemn anyone. God's mercy is available to all, and God can heal anything, for God is love itself.

Each year when I go to the March, what strikes me is the joy present. People are singing and dancing. People are celebrating the goodness of life. It is not defined by the fact that it is a protest, but by the fact that it is a joyful witness, mostly of young people, and I would say predominantly young women. At age 31, I feel old. That's how young it is! And I want to say that again, though: it is a joyful witness.

That's important because of what got me thinking about this. I'm part of a program in the diocese that trains teenagers how to be missionary disciples: to grow in prayer, explain the faith, and evangelize their peers. Parishes can send one or two teens to participate, and recently, one young woman said, "I intellectually understand the Church's position on this matter, but in the face of a woman who has a concrete choice to make, I do not know if I can truly say that I think the Church is right." We can speak all about the science behind why the Church believes what it believes, but as this young woman acknowledged, there was a disconnect within her. Some began to explain the science to her again, as if it was like, if she only really understood, this wouldn't be a problem. But that was not the problem: her head and her heart were not on the same page.

I suggested to the group that often what draws the heart is beauty. Gestures like Pope Francis or before him Pope Benedict or Saint John Paul II getting down from the popemobile to hug a sick

child says more about the dignity of the human person than any intellectual argument. People like Mother Teresa picking up a dying person from a gutter in Calcutta says more about the dignity of the human person than any argument could. And visiting a home run by the Sisters of Life, and seeing what supporting a woman with an unplanned pregnancy looks like when surrounded by love and a supportive community, and seeing her joy when she gives birth, that is more convincing than any argument.

Isaiah in his time had to deliver a message. It was so urgent that he said he could not contain himself, “For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet”

And what was that good news? That God has been chasing each one of us our entire lives because he wants to love us intimately. “As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.”

The theme at this year’s March for Life was something like, “Unique from the first moments,” referring to genetics and science, but because each one of us is unique from that first moment, we are wildly and passionately loved by God.

Saint John Paul II called on Catholics to build a culture of life and a civilization of love. These must go together: a culture of life is only possible within the civilization of love. I know, for example, that most parishes could find homes for children, good, loving homes, for any child who was unexpected and whose parents did not think they could care for that child. Do people know that? Do people know that our love for human life starts at conception and runs until natural death because life is a precious gift from God worth living? And do they know that if they are hurting from past mistakes, and I don’t just mean regarding the life issues, that we are not here to judge or condemn them, for we are all sinners, but that we want them to know the love, and mercy, and forgiveness of God, that love means we are with you and supporting you in all the difficult moments in one’s life?

The world offers us limited options, what I would like to call today mediocre wine, but Christ brings something new to the table. He can turn water into wine. He brings new wine, the best wine, the new wine of mercy and joy and peace because each one of us unique and precious and loved.