



I am looking forward to this afternoon. Perhaps, you may be thinking that I am referring to my love affair with the New York Jets (one that has led to heart being broken more than touchdowns we have scored). I am excited about baptizing four infants at three o'clock. I love when I am assigned to do the bi-weekly baptisms here at St. Martin's. The babies are so beautiful, the parents and families so happy, and it is such a joyful event to welcome these precious gifts of God to our parish family. I love to look at the tiny fingernails of the baby or their shining inquisitive eyes, and their smiles melt the heart.

Unless you live on top of a faraway, or have been on a long silent retreat in the desert, you have heard about the kneeling and standing controversy as the *Star-Spangled Banner*, our national anthem, is played at the National Football League games. Whether you wouldn't know a touchdown from hockey puck, most Americans have very strong feelings about this topic, and I know I may be causing problems for myself by even mentioning it. I do not bring it up to give you my opinion as much as to use it as an example. If you are angry at those who you feel are disrespecting our nation and our flag by their actions, or if you feel that the people who are protesting are within their rights and have an issue worthy of consideration, your thoughts and emotions would be based on certain principles that are very important to you. Although our emotions can be very powerful, we are a people of reason and logic.

Today is Pro-life Sunday in the Catholic churches of the United States. In addition to being the month of the holy rosary, October is a month that we give special focus to this most profound topic of life. We will soon begin our annual baby bottle campaign. Debates about life in our nation continue to be a core issue in our society, with very strong and passionate feelings on all sides of the issues.

Certainly, and rightly so, the first issue that most of us think about when it comes to discussions of life is that of births and abortions. In the teaching of our church, the protection of human life in the womb is the most primary and beginning of all life discussions. Still, we know that the pro-life issues and respect for life go well

beyond this core essential reality of the need to seek to protect life from the moment of conception.

Our Catholic faith calls us to see the gift of human life from conception to natural death. I am shocked when I hear about American laws in some states that, in the case of a failed abortion with the baby being born *accidentally* alive, there are states allows that newborn infant to die, and the doctors are not bound to care for the child. Most Americans are shocked by the terrible practice of partial birth abortion. I recently read about a state court that allows abortions on the grounds of the parents wanting a different sex for their child or permitting abortions if the infant might be born with some genetic issues. We also know that end of life issues are being challenged with more and more states approving assisted suicides for the terminally ill.

But, I worry that I am not as shocked when a man or woman, sometimes suffering from mental limitations, being poor and unable to afford a decent legal defense, is put to death by lethal injection, with his arm being swapped with alcohol to prevent an infection. Even though he may well be guilty of a terrible crime, should the state, in our name, appoint people to take his/her life?

There is no more complicated issue for me than illegal immigration. I believe a nation has a right to decide its borders and who can come in and who cannot. Yet, the idea of deporting a young person who came to this country at the age of three or four, has lived his or her whole life here into his/her twenties or thirties, makes me pause and think and how we are treating the person.

I am no pacifist. I am very proud of the men and women who so generously and courageously serve and protect us. I am very proud of nephew who is a retired colonel in the army. I believe we have a right to protect ourselves. But I also try to close my eyes to the fact that there are times when we try to kill the enemy, and we leave behind dead women and children.

If immigration is a complex topic, then the need for all Americans to have health care is even more beyond my ability comprehension in terms of how this is to be done. I know medical resources are limited. I know we have a national debt with too many zeros. Add to this mix, homelessness, poverty, and poor education and you have what has baffled both the Democrats and the Republicans for decades. However, these issues are life issues since they so affect people.

I am always surprised when a newly appointed bishop is appointed to a diocese and is interviewed by the media. When the bishop states his position against abortion, the media tends to say he is conservative. If the bishop speaks about immigration or the poor, he is considered a liberal. Being against abortion is not a political position, it is the teaching of the Catholic faith. Speaking against polices that hurt the poor, the immigrant, the marginalized are not liberal positions; they flow from the words of Jesus: *love your neighbor as you love yourself*.

**In the case of abortion, this is not a Church teaching such as to fast during Lent and to go to attend Mass on Sunday. This teaching is based on a both a moral and legal principle. Does the fetus, the baby to be, have any rights? At what moment does this *so-called mass of tissue* become a human being? I recall Ronald Reagan saying if you were driving a car and saw something up ahead and wondered if it were a person or not, you would slow down and stop. He applied this to an infant in the womb. When in doubt about life and when it begins, slow down and stop. Catholics believe firmly that life from the moment of conception is to be held sacred and protected.**

**As strongly as I feel about life and all the issues that need to be addressed, I do not think that all of us fail at times. There may be someone here today who has had an abortion. You may have chosen it freely, you have been young and felt hopeless, or were pressured by others. I know you too carry a burden but I ask you to trust in the compassionate and unbounded mercy of God and seek reconciliation. You too are precious to the Lord. No one is outside the mercy of God.**

**The basic principle of Catholicism is that life is a gift from God. Last week, I spoke at all the Masses about stewardship: that everything we have from God is a gift and we are to take care and protect it. There is not more basic a gift than life. Thank you Lord for the gift of life.**