

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This weekend I address all Catholics throughout the Diocese of Columbus. This coming Tuesday, there will be a very important vote regarding enshrining abortion in the Constitution of Ohio. I urge all of you who have not yet voted to vote No on Issue 1. **No in November**. I encourage you to invite your family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers to vote No. If you know an elderly or homebound person who needs transportation, offer to drive them so that they can participate in the political process. Our *No* to this amendment is an expression of our great *Yes* to the gift of human life and to God Himself.

Two Sundays ago, Jesus said in the Gospel: “Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God.” God is the author of life and Lord of all creation. After making man and woman in His image and likeness, He declared His creation to be *very good*. We are called to be stewards of creation and to give back to God what belongs to God. Look around you – your fellow parishioners, infants in their mothers’ arms, your spouse – they all have dignity and value. Each is a masterpiece *of* God, made in His image, bearing His likeness. We are to render unto God what belongs to God, offering Him our very lives.

Last Sunday, Jesus summarized the law and prophets in two commandments: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. To love God only with our lips is not enough. We show our love of God by loving our neighbor, including the unborn. I am astounded by how many people, especially Catholics, tirelessly serve the poor and accompany women and their children – at the Pregnancy Decision Health Centers, the Women’s Care Center, at the St. Vincent de Paul Centers throughout the Diocese; through Seton Housing, sheltering the homeless; at food pantries and soup kitchens; and through our Catholic healthcare ministries and visits to the sick and elderly. Our responsibility to our neighbor extends far beyond the womb. Many of our parishes carry out the Walking with Moms Initiative. We commit ourselves to accompanying women, their children, and their families.

Nevertheless, I urge you to vote *No* because if the rights of the unborn are not protected then other populations too become vulnerable. Pope Francis has said:

“Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church’s effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right.

It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, “every violation of the personal dignity of

the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the creator of the individual”.” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 213)

To protect the rights of the vulnerable, I urge you to vote No. I also urge you to vote No, not only because this amendment would permit abortion even in the latest stages of pregnancy, but also because it takes rights away from parents in making decisions regarding their minor children. The amendment does not apply to adults but says *any individual*. The amendment is not restricted to permitting abortion; the language says “*reproductive decisions*”, which would also include gender reassignment, without parental consent or knowledge. The amendment puts women at risk by making it nearly impossible to prosecute those who have abused women or female minors and who pressure them to have abortions and those women who have been trafficked, who subsequently are pressured into ending their pregnancy. Issue 1 simply goes too far – even for some who identify as pro-choice.

This is not merely a political issue; it is fundamentally a moral issue. Will we accept our responsibility as Catholics to protect the rights of parents, vulnerable women, and the unborn? Will we acknowledge God as the Lord of Life?

In this Sunday’s Liturgy, Paul invites us to draw near to the Gospel “*not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God*”. Jesus offers a warning to our conscience to conform our way of living to it. In today’s passage, He rebukes the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Jesus notes that they “*preach, but do not practice*” ; rather “*they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.*”.

Catholics throughout the Diocese are lifting their hands and voices to lighten the burdens of women and children, but we need your help to be the people that God has called us to be – a people of life, a people who celebrate life, nourish life, cherish life, and protect and defend life. I urge you to vote No in November. No matter how the election goes, the day after the election, there will still be women who are contemplating abortion, and we need to be there to offer support so that they know they can say Yes to life – to assure them of a network of support, to remind them that they and their children are loved. We need to make abortion unthinkable.

By voting No in November, we will offer the answer to the question of Malachi the prophet in the first reading: “*Have we not all the one father? Has not the one God created us? Why then do we break faith with one another?*” We are part of the same human family. Jesus Himself says in the Gospel, “*You are all brothers ... you have but one Father in heaven.*”

At the end of November, we will celebrate the Feast of the Christ the King. The Gospel that day is the separation of the sheep from the goats – the Last Judgment. Christ will say, “*Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.*” Stand beside the least of our brothers and sisters, defending their right to life, acknowledging that there is one God and Father of us all. Say Yes to God and human life. Vote No in November.