

Archbishop of Los Angeles on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade

## This culture of death will one day pass away

Archbishop José H. Gomez presided at a special Requiem Mass for the Unborn on 21 January, the vigil of the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. The following is adapted from the Archbishop's homily.

Nearly 40 years of legalized abortion in our country is too long. There have been too many innocent lives lost. Too many men and women wounded in body, mind and spirit. Too many consciences compromised. Too many Rachels weeping. And our culture of abortion continues to cause new threats to the sanctity of human life. I am thinking especially of experiments on human embryos, the new eugenics and the idea of "designer babies", and our society's slow drift to euthanasia.

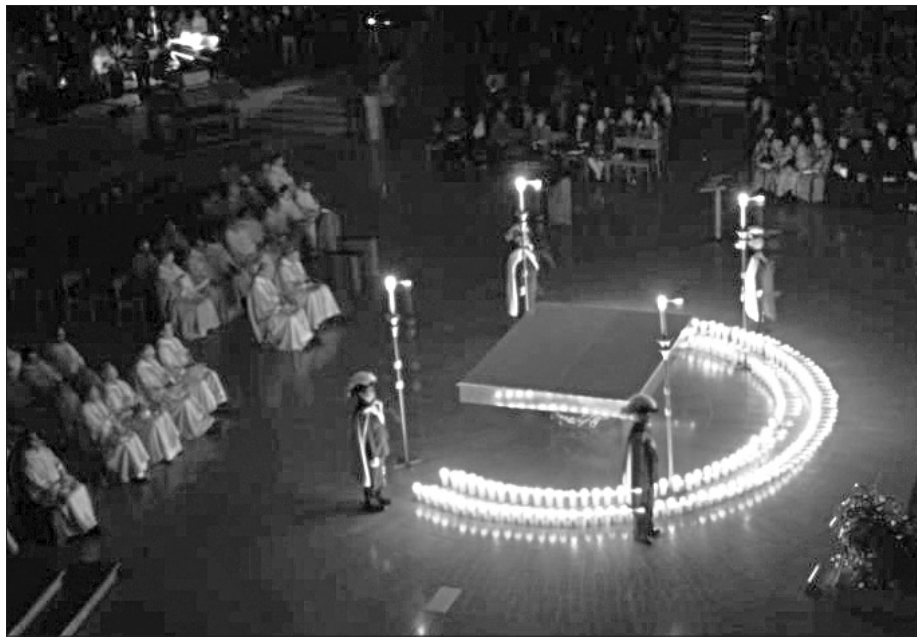
As a Catholic people, we need to ask the Holy Innocents to pray for our nation. In the Church's Tradition, the children Herod killed were some of the first martyrs for Jesus. They were the first to suffer for his name, the first to proclaim Christ by the witness of their blood. On this earth they were not allowed to live long enough to learn to talk or to walk. Yet they are in heaven now, where they follow the Lamb of God and sing his praises with joy and everlasting gladness.

Today when we read the story of the massacre of the innocents in St Matthew's Gospel, we hear it as a kind of symbolic picture of the drama of human history – which is the struggle of good against evil, and light against darkness, and life against death. Jesus Christ is the Author of life and the true light that enlightens every person coming into the world. Yet from the time of his coming until our own day, the powers of death and darkness have gathered against his light, and against the life that Jesus comes to offer us.

In the Gospel, the wicked King Herod is a symbol for all those rulers and forces in our world that are afraid and jealous of God. All those forces that seek to cast God out from the world he created and to erase the memory of him from our society. Herod wants this world all for himself. He wants us all to live as if God does not exist. And the price for Herod's ambition is paid for in the lives of innocent children, in the ruin of their families.

It is still the same today, with the "Herods" of our world. The child is sacrificed. The family is under attack. The "right to choose" abortion has become an expectation of freedom in American society, something men and women presume – like their right to freedom of speech or freedom of worship.

But God's truth is true even when our society does not acknowledge it. Slavery was evil even when a majority in this country held that it was good. It was wrong even when the U.S. Supreme Court said that it was right. In the 1950s and 1960s, racial segregation was evil even though Southern lawmakers and governors



said it was necessary to prevent greater evils. A lesser evil remains evil. It took far too long, and too many generations and innocent lives were lost, before this nation finally saw the truth about the full humanity and dignity of African Americans. It took a century to abolish slavery and another century after that to put an end to the Jim Crow laws that reduced African Americans to second-class citizens. And we still have more work to do.

And in the same way, Americans will one day also come to see the truth about the humanity of the unborn child and the human embryo. It is only a matter of time. May it be years and not decades! But the time *will* come. Because this is the truth. It is not a "religious" truth and abortion is not just a "Catholic" issue. Modern biology shows us that human life begins at conception. The embryo does not "become human" somewhere down the line. Within a few weeks in the womb, the embryo has a tiny face and a beating heart. This is a unique, personal human life – distinct from

that of the father and mother. Again, this is the truth of biology not theology, a truth of science not religion. America was also founded on a truth – the great moral truth that all men and women are created equal and are born with God-given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

*Roe v. Wade* turned this beautiful truth inside out. The Supreme Court, in effect, said that our rights do not come from God but instead are bestowed by government – by courts and legislatures. But that is not the truth. And if our rights are not endowed by God, then they are subject to the random whims of those who hold political power. The strong get to decide what is right and wrong, who has rights and who does not, who gets to live and who does not.

That is why the Church will always remain at the center of this great struggle for the right to life in our time. We are called to be a voice for those who have no voice. We are called to help our society see that every human life – from conception

to natural death – is sacred and precious to God. We are called to remind our brothers and sisters that the right to life is the foundation of every other right and liberty in our society.

So we must keep on going in our struggle for the Gospel of life. We all must do our part. We can never give up until our world comes to know the truth – that every child is God's own child, a precious gift and a blessing. We can never give up until our society sees that every child is created in God's own image and likeness; created in love for a reason in his plan of salvation.

This is the beautiful truth and mystery of our religion. Our God loved us so much that he chose to enter into our world as each one of us did – through the womb of a mother. Our God loved us so much that he wanted to grow up in a human family. This is the other side of the Gospel story of the massacre of the holy innocents. On the one hand, we see the families ruined by Herod. But Herod does not win. Evil and death do not prevail. Because there is another family – the Holy Family of Mary, St Joseph and the Child Jesus. Our salvation comes to us through the Child Jesus in the sanctuary of the Holy Family. That is why the human child and the human family are so important to our civilization! In the child and the family we see the love of God.

In the Gospel story, the angel tells St Joseph: "Rise, take the Child and his mother". And Joseph does exactly what God asks of him.

Now this is our duty. Each one of us must hear the voice of God. Each one of us must rise and take the Child Jesus and his mother Mary into the dark night of our culture.

Like St Joseph, we need to be guardians of the light of life, and shine that light in our world. We need to tell the world the good news of this Child – that the Son of God became a child of Mary so that every mother's child can become a child of God.

We honor the lives of the unborn by our loving service to our brothers and sisters. And we honor them by our prayers for healing and conversion for all those caught up in this tragedy and crime – the mothers and fathers directly involved; all those responsible for promoting our culture of abortion.

We know that our God is not the God of the dead, he is the God of the living! His love for us is stronger even than death! Jesus has promised to wipe away the tears from every eye. He has promised no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain! That he will destroy death forever and make all things new!

So we know that our world is not destined to darkness and death. Jesus is the Lord of history and we know he keeps his promises. So the powers of death will never prevail against his Church! This culture of death in our society will one day pass away!

### From Jesus' prayer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

far; let us ask him to be able always to open our prayer to the dimensions of the world, not closing it to the request for help with our problems but remembering our neighbour before the Lord, learning the beauty of interceding for others; let us ask him for the gift of visible unity among all believers in Christ – we have invoked it forcefully in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – let us pray to be ever ready to answer any one who asks us to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). Many thanks.

#### TO SPECIAL GROUPS

I offer a warm welcome to the students of the Bossey Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies in

Switzerland, and I offer prayerful good wishes for their work. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, an affectionate thought goes to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which ends today, offers us the opportunity to reflect on our belonging to Christ and to the Church. Dear *young people*, trust in the teachings of the Church, which aim for your integral development. Dear *sick people*, offer your sufferings for the cause of the unity of the Church of Christ. And you, dear *newlyweds*, raise your children in accordance with the logic of love freely given, on the model of God's love for humanity.