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Address to the Catholic Physicians' Guild of Chicago

by

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In our second scripture reading tonight, Paul the Apostle encountered opposition. He said that Alexander the Coppersmith "strongly resisted our preaching..." He complained to Timothy: "In fact, everyone abandoned me" ...except the loyal physician: "I have no one with me but Luke." You, members of the Catholic Physicians' Guild and your wives and guests, gathered here tonight in Archbishop Quigley Chapel, are the successors of St. Luke – as I am a successor of the Apostle, Paul.

I always feel especially close to the members of the medical profession, because we are co-workers battling the effects of original sin: both physical and moral – disease and sin.

There are many things I would like to discuss with you today, but the one that looms the largest, the one I shall address is life. Human life, the theme of John Paul II's wonderful encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of Life. The sanctity of human life. It was the theme of Pope John Paul's World Youth Day in Denver four years ago, taken from the words of Jesus, "I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly." It was also both the theme and the title of the now famous Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, issued nearly 30 years ago and entitled *Humanae Vitae*, Human Life.

How we need this message today! This message today, when the gangs in our streets are shooting randomly and taking so many human lives. In this day and age, when Dr. Kevorkian and those of his ilk are glorifying death. In this day and age, when even so many laws of our land, the President of our country and the Supreme Court of the United States uphold the right to destroy human life in the womb. Pope John Paul II, when he arrived in Denver, quoted to President Clinton what he had said when he left Detroit in 1987: "America, you are beautiful and blessed in so many ways...but your best beauty and your richest blessing is found in the human person: in each man, woman, and child, in every immigrant, in every native-born son and daughter...the ultimate test of your greatness is the way you treat every human being, especially the weakest and most defenseless ones. The best traditions of your land presume respect for those who cannot defend themselves. If you want equal justice for all, and true freedom and lasting peace, then, America, defend life. All the great causes that are yours today will have meaning only to the extent that you guarantee the right to life and protect the human person."

We don't.

I read recently that the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC is 500 feet long. If this were to be replicated with the name of each baby that has been aborted since *Roe v. Wade*, inscribed on a similar wall, the aborted baby memorial would be more than 60 miles long.

Humane Vitae, in my opinion, is one of the most prophetic, historic, and important encyclicals that has ever been issued by a successor of St. Peter.

Pope Paul VI recognized that at the time. You probably have heard, as I have countless times in the past quarter of a century, that he was very anguished and wondered whether he should or should not issue that encyclical, and wondered afterwards whether he had done the right thing. The spin doctors from his day to ours have continued to put out that message. It is false. A few years ago, I spent half an hour with one of his closest collaborators of the time, now a cardinal, who told me that Paul VI was greatly at peace in the issuance of that encyclical, and said that though people at that time may not accept it, future generations would thank and bless him for it. I think we are beginning to see the first streaks of the dawn of that day.

When the encyclical was issued, I was studying in Southern

California. The banner headline of the San Diego evening news announcing the encyclical was: "Pope Bans Pill." I was terribly puzzled when I read the entire encyclical, a document of about 25 pages in the edition I had, where I found only one sentence in which an oblique reference that could also apply to the pill was made. The encyclical was not about the pill. Its very Latin title tells what it is about: *Humanae Vitae* – Human Life!

I would now like to suggest a few kernel thoughts for reflection and meditation.

In paragraphs 11 and 12 of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI speaks of the respect for nature and the purpose of the marriage act. And he speaks of the inseparable connection between union and procreation. That does not mean that every marriage act must be or is necessarily procreative. It certainly is not during infertile periods. It certainly is not after the childbearing years. It certainly is not after a woman has had a hysterectomy.

What it does mean is that the pleasure and the purpose go together, that this activity belongs only in marriage, that in marriage it is blessed and holy and sacred, and outside of marriage or apart from marriage, or in marriage but apart from God's plan, and thwarting and contradicting human nature as He created it, is sinful.

There is a splendid comparison in the strongest human drive we have, the drive for survival, and the wonderful appetite of hunger that encourages us to eat in order to be nourished in order to survive. That does not mean that every time we eat, it must be only for nourishment. We can enjoy the pleasure of a sundae after we have had sufficient nourishment at dinner. It is perfectly all right to have a pizza at 11 o'clock in the evening while we're watching TV. But it would be wrong to divorce the pleasure from the purpose as the Romans used to do, causing themselves to disgorge what they had eaten in order that they could enjoy the pleasure of eating more. They divorced the pleasure from God's purpose and in that precisely was the evident sinfulness.

God gave the pleasure of eating to satisfy the appetite of hunger, and as a reward for preserving and nourishing the life of the individual. God gave venereal pleasure, sexual pleasure, as an encouragement to get married and as a reward for engaging in those activities which will preserve the race.

It is not the use of the appetite that is wrong, but the misuse,

using it contrary, even contradictory, to the way God made it. Its use is to take place only by married people in marriage. As Genesis says: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body." (Gen. 2:24), a citation quoted also by Jesus (cf. Matt 19:5 and Mark 10:7-8). Why? Because it is in marriage that children, if conceived, can most properly be raised, educated and come to know, love, and serve God and thus attain their eternal destiny.

Pope Paul VI understood that this can be difficult, and that there may be failures. He very pastorally said of married couples: "Let them implore Divine assistance by persevering prayer; above all, let them draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humbler perseverance to the Mercy of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance."

In my opinion, the nub, the core, the heart of the problem for those who disagree with the Pope in this critical, crucial teaching is that they want to say that sometimes it is all right to separate the pleasure and the purpose, instead of saying, as we do:

When we lose our temper
When we gossip about others
When we commit adultery
When we do not speak the truth
When we take what does not belong to us:
"I've sinned and I'm sorry."

They would say: "I haven't sinned and I'm not sorry, and I'll do what I want in spite of the way God has obviously made the human body.

So twenty-five years ago, they said contraception is okay, and today some would say that homosexual activity is okay. We don't condemn homosexuals – just as Jesus did not condemn the woman caught in adultery. But he also didn't condone her actions. He said; "Avoid this *sin* in the future."

I can be very understanding of the human weakness of either contraception or homosexual activity.

But they both divorce the pleasure from the purpose.

Both are against nature.

Both are therefore sinful and wrong.

Understandable human weakness? Sure.

But right? No! To say that wrong is right – is wrong! To reject the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* is to go down that road, a road that many have already traveled.

And if pleasure is sufficient in itself for the exercise of the sexual faculty, quite divorced from its obvious purpose, then the creator's plan is out the window, and human pleasure becomes the be all and the end all of the human condition. It ultimately leads to death – first spiritual death and increasingly often, human death (*Humanae Mortis*) – instead of human life (*Humanae Vitae*). We are witnessing today the disaster that this is causing. We are living very much in a pro-death society in which what I want has precedence over human nature, the rights of God and the rights of others, both born and unborn. We have put ourselves at odds with the creator. We are calling the shots, according to what we want to do instead of according to the will of the Creator Who fashioned us. It is Eden replayed. I'll do what I want, regardless of what God wills.

I know I'm not telling you anything you don't know. The *Catholic Physicians' Guild is outstanding in its defense of human life and in doing everything possible to preserve human life*. I just want you to know how deeply appreciative we are and how closely we, as Bishops, wish to walk with you in your wonderful work so that human life is upheld and never contravened.

A few years ago, in the Red Mass of the Cathedral for the opening of court season, I enlisted the help of the Will County Bar Association in this battle. I pointed out to them that abortion is killing, not healing. The Clinton Plan essentially classifies abortion as a "healing" service. But abortion is "health care" only if a child is a disease.

The anti-life forces used to say that abortion is a private choice. Now they say the public must be forced to pay for it.

They used to say "choice" is an American right. Now they say the public has no right to *choose* not to pay for it.

They used to say if you are against abortion, don't have one. Now they say...we'll force you to pay for someone else's.

Speak up and speak out – for life! I could probably truly say: "The life you save may be your own! Catholic theology does not teach

that we must take extraordinary means that really do not prolong life, but merely delay death. But it *does* teach that we can't do anything to prevent life or to *cause* death.

I would like to conclude by sharing with you two profound personal experiences with candidates for both euthanasia and abortion. I came to appreciate the value of impaired, handicapped life as I was privileged to offer Mass in the room of the dying Bishop Romeo Blanchette every day for the last few years of his life. A victim of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), he was able to do nothing more than blink the last year and a half. Yet even in that condition, he counseled, inspired, wrote letters and composed several 800-word articles for publication, articles that spanned the globe and were translated into foreign languages. By a blinking code he had devised before losing his voice, first we, then he, came to realize that he did more good when he couldn't move, and could only blink, than in his decades of active ministry.

We would count slowly: "1,2,3,4,5,6..."(Blink). That meant there were six letters in the word. "First letter, vowel?" (Blink) "A-E-I..." (Blink). The first of the six letters is "I". One could presume the next letter after a vowel would be a consonant. "First half?" (No blink), so it is the second half of the alphabet. "M-N" (Blink) The second letter is "N".

Today Bishop Blanchette would, for some, have been a candidate for euthanasia during the last years of his most effective ministry.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of human life, Pope John Paul II once said: "Ultimately the purpose of the Church's teaching in this field is to defend the inalienable dignity and fundamental rights of the human person." In this regard, the Church cannot fail to emphasize the need to safeguard the life and sanctity of the human embryo and fetus. To illustrate this, I wish to share with you another profound personal experience that I had as principal of Providence Catholic High School. It was a talk given by a senior boy to his classmates on a retreat. I will quote him verbatim:

I would like to tell you a story about four people whose ideas I admire very much.

The first two people had been going out for about a year and were

in college. Both had rather bright futures. They went to a party one night. Everyone was drinking. So they had a few social drinks. Shortly, they had a few too many drinks and decided to go for a walk. They went back to her apartment and sat and talked for a while. Before the night was over, they had shared with each other what they were saving for marriage. She later learned she was pregnant. She and her boy friend had to decide what to do. They first thought of abortion. This seemed like the easiest thing to do, but they realized that neither of them wanted this. They would not take a life because of their mistake. She decided to have the baby.

This couple did not know the other two people. They were married and had a happy life. They were caring and have a lot of love to offer. *What do these four people have in common?* They are my parents. All of them.

The married couple wasn't able to have children. They prayed and prayed to God so they might be sent a child, and through the love of the other couple, He gave them me. I could easily have been aborted, but I wasn't. God put two different kinds of love together and made this situation, which must have seemed terrible, into one of the most beautiful gifts of love, *adoption*. I could be bitter or angry. I could ask why my natural parents gave me up. But I don't. This is God's gift to me. And if you look at these four people, you will see a lot of different ideals, which were all good. To sum up my feelings, I would like to read you this poem:

"Two Different Kinds of Love"

Once there were two women,
Who never knew each other.
One you do not remember,
The other you call mother.

Two different lives,
Shaped to make yours one.
One became your guiding star,
The other became your sun.

The first gave you life,
The second taught you to live in it.
The first gave you a need for love,
And the second was there to give it.

One gave you a nationality,
The other gave you a name.
One gave you the seed of a talent,
The other gave you an aim.

One gave you emotions,
The other calmed your fears,
One saw your first smile,
The other dried your tears.

One gave you up,
It was all that she could do.
The other prayed for a child,
And was led straight to you.

And now you ask me through your tears,
The age-old question through the years,
Heredity or environment – which are you the
product of?
Neither, my darling, neither,
Just two different kinds of love.

Pope John Paul II has said that on many issues, especially with regard to moral questions, the teaching of the Church in our day is placed in a cultural context that makes it more difficult to understand – and yet, more urgent for promoting the true good of men and women. And he added: "Nowhere is this more evident than in questions relating to the transmission of human life and to the inalienable right to life of the unborn."

The fifth commandment as given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai is: "Thou shalt not kill." I say, with Jesus: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's...but not the things that are God's." And from womb to tomb, we hold this truth to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed *by their creator* with certain inalienable rights (an inalienable right is one that can neither be given away nor taken away) and among these are life. Human life. *Humanae Vitae!* It is a Gospel truth – the Gospel of life! And yours, dear doctors, is the vocation and the profession dedicated to its preservation. Thank you and God bless you!