



Homily of Rt. Rev. Mark Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury

For the Pro-Life Pilgrimage to Walsingham, 23rd October 2021

The great Pope, and indeed the great Saint, who led the Church into this new millennium, foresaw a struggle of apocalyptic proportions to uphold the sanctity of human life. Saint John Paul II helped us see that every rejection of human life *“is really a rejection of Christ”* Himselfⁱ and to recognise in Mary’s Motherhood *“... the incomparable model of how life should be welcomed and cared for”*ⁱⁱ He often recalled the words of the same Jesus who said, *“Whoever receives a little child in my name receives me”*;ⁱⁱⁱ and *“Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me”*.^{iv} In this way, Pope Saint John Paul wanted us to see how every life threatened is a life united by the Incarnation to that of the Son of God Himself.^v In today’s proliferating attacks on the lives of those most vulnerable, we are witnessing nothing less than a rejection of God-made-man.

The Book of Revelation describes how monstrous evil pursues and seeks to devour the Child born of the Blessed Mother. This attack is perpetuated today in everything that rejects and destroys human life from its beginning. This is the dramatic perspective in which we gather in Walsingham today. Walsingham established almost a millennium ago, so that *“... the great joy of the Annunciation”* - that is, the Mystery of the Incarnation, might never fade from the memory of people of this land.^{vi} As we ask for courage to proclaim the Gospel of Life in post-pandemic Britain, let us also ask to share its joy.

The Pro-Life movement will surely stand as one of the noblest movements in human history and its victory is ultimately assured. Yet, the path to that victory of life over death, at times faces many contradictions. How are we to understand that in Britain today, a society that mobilised itself in a pandemic, making many sacrifices to protect the lives of the vulnerable, is now considering assisting the suicide of some the most vulnerable members of society? Dismayed by such contradictions, we must never lose the joy and hope that is the hallmark of the cause of life.

I recall almost half a century ago, the founders of the pro-life movement tirelessly travelling to meetings across this land, communicating how the cause of life is the most positive of all causes. If we were confident at the time, that a “culture of death” would be quickly overcome; that public opinion would never long tolerate the killing of the unborn on an industrial scale; if we thought that rational argument must surely prevail; and that to move consciences it would be sufficient to expose the cruel reality of abortion, we soon came to see how a culture of death advances remorselessly, precisely by dulling human consciences. A process where it becomes possible to propose that pre-born children with disabilities be killed up to the point of birth.

We recently heard the brave voice of Heidi Carter, a woman with Downes Syndrome, say, *“The law does not respect my life.”* Remarkably, this cry barely elicited a moment of public concern. Meanwhile, the Euthanasia Lobby which has campaigned since the 1930’s – a time when unspeakable crimes were being committed in the name of eugenics - brings forward Bill after Bill to break the legal protections surrounding the care of the sick and the dying. It advocates opening the way for assisted suicide theoretically, in carefully regulated cases. Yet, experience in other jurisdictions shows that in practice this culture of assisted suicide extends rapidly to include those with mental illnesses and even young children.

In this century we can expect a protracted struggle and we must be ready for repeated assaults on both the laws and the social environments of care, which have long protected and cherished the lives of our society’s weakest members. Yet, this struggle is the opportunity to give witness to the value of every human life and to announce once more the Gospel of Life with joy.

In the Book of Revelation, we hear how a loud voice declares from the throne of God *“Death shall be no more ...!”*.^{vii} This is the promise that every fearful manifestation of evil which threatens to overwhelm humanity and thwart God’s purpose, will finally be dispelled by the total victory of life. For beneath the surface of events, we glimpse how the struggle to hold human life sacred, is a spiritual battle, part of the dramatic struggle which the Second Vatican Council declared will continue until the end of time.^{viii}

The same Council of the Church pointed to the Mother of God as *“the great sign”*^{ix} and the assurance of the victory which already shines out.^x Today in Walsingham, we turn our gaze to Blessed Mary as the *“... Mother of the living”* and entrust *the cause of life* to her anew.^{xi}

ⁱ Evangelium Vitae No. 104

ⁱⁱ Evangelium Vitae No. 102

ⁱⁱⁱ Mt. 18:5

^{iv} Mt. 25:40

^v Cf. Gaudium et Spes No. 22

^{vi} Cf. Pynson Ballad

^{vii} Rev. 21:4

^{viii} Cf. Gaudium et Spes No. 37

^{ix} Rev. 12:1

^x Cf. Lumen Gentium No. 68

^{xi} Cf. Evangelium Vitae No. 15