

Homily for Walsingham Pro-life Pilgrimage of Reparation and Prayer for the Sanctity of Life

1.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on our pilgrimage of Reparation and Prayer for the Sanctity of Life.

We have come here to Walsingham because we want to draw closer to our Mother, like countless Catholics before us for more than a thousand years.

Our Lady's Shrine at Walsingham was once one of the major pilgrimage sites of Christendom. Think of the millions of Catholics from this country and from throughout Europe who came, like us, as pilgrims seeking to draw closer of the sanctity of Mary, the Mother of God.

I've mentioned the word 'sanctity' twice now, 'the sanctity of Life', the sanctity of human life, and the sanctity of Mary, the Mother of the eternally begotten Son of God.

2.

What is sanctity?

Every Sunday we pray the Sanctus, the great hymn of praise of God's holiness, 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus'. 'Holy, Holy, Holy.'

Sanctity is the wondrous presence of God's holiness at work in human life, made in the image of God, and at work in the life of Mary, the immaculate image of God, through the grace of Christ.

Sanctity is never abstract, it is always made real, through sacraments and sacramentals.

The sanctity that we draw close to here at Walsingham is not abstract, but has been made present through the Shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth.

Tradition has it that a certain Richeldis de Faverchoes prayed that she might undertake some special work in honour of Our Lady. In answer she was led in spirit to the Holy House of Nazareth, where Mary, in conversation with the angel Gabriel, consented to becoming the Mother of Jesus. In turn Richeldis was invited to build a replica of the Holy House here in Walsingham.

The sanctity that draws us here to Walsingham is that of the Holy Home of Nazareth, the home that Mary created when she gave her consent to God's mysterious plan, the home she created, through the power of the Holy Spirit, when she conceived the eternal Word of God in her virginal womb.

Listen to these words of St Thomas Aquinas about the sanctity of Our Lady and the conception of the Son of God:

'She was so filled with grace that from her soul grace poured into her flesh from which was conceived the Son of God'.

I'll just say again these marvellous words:

'She was so filled with grace that from her soul grace poured into her flesh from which was conceived the Son of God'.

And here are the words of St Clare of Assisi:

'A Son whom the heavens could not contain, and yet she carried Him in the little enclosure of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap.'

This is why Walsingham is so important to the Pro-life movement in this country, and dare I say to the pro-life movement in the whole world, because the sanctity of Home is at the heart of pro-life.

Home is the making present, the making real of love, care, mutual self-sacrifice.

Home is where children are conceived, welcomed, and sometimes born.

Home is where children are cherished and raised

Home is where the sick are nursed and cared for.

Home is where we prepare for death, and where some of us die.

Yes, abortion, contraception, euthanasia, and assisted suicide destroy life, and they also destroy the sanctity of home. This is why there are so many broken homes in our country.

The shocking outbreak of rioting that occurred in England during the summer was a symptom of the broken homes that so many of these children and young people are growing up in.

I'm sure that one of the causes of these broken homes is the fact that more than 5 million unborn children have been killed through abortion since the Abortion Act was passed in the late **1960's**.

3.

I wrote about this link between violence among young people and abortion in my book *Fit for Mission? Church*.

"I am convinced that there must be profoundly damaging consequences for the family in a country where contraception and abortion are so widespread. No wonder so many children are suffering depression and mental illness in a country that is such a hostile environment for human life."

"I am convinced another cause of the wide-spread violence lies in the Abortion Act of 1967. For 41 years we've lived in a state-sponsored culture of death that has killed 5 million children, and we're now surprised that some of the surviving children have turned out violent with no regard for the sanctity of life?"

"How many children know that their mothers have had an abortion? What effect will it have on them knowing that they have been deprived of a brother or sister through abortion?"

"If a society holds human life so cheaply is it any surprise that young people will also hold life cheaply and engage in violence?"

This is why we have come on pilgrimage to Walsingham, to make reparation for the desecration of so many homes throughout Our Lady's Dowry, homes that should have been reflections of the Holy House of Nazareth but have been broken by abortion, contraception and the culture of death.

We also come to ask Our Lady to intercede for us that God continues to bless our homes with the life-giving grace of Nazareth, and to heal the broken homes throughout the UK that cause so much heart-ache and deprivation.

4.

Pope Benedict, one of the world's great teachers of the Gospel of Life, talks about the urgent need to promote and defend the 'ecology of man'.

The word 'ecology' comes from the Greek word 'eco' which means 'house' or 'home'. Pope

Benedict is calling on Catholics to promote and defend the home of man that has its origins and principles in the creative will and purpose of God.

This is what Pope Benedict said about the 'ecology of man' during his State Visit to Germany last week:

"The importance of ecology is no longer disputed. We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly. Yet I would like to underline a point that seems to me to be neglected, today as in the past: there is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.'

Earlier in 2008 Pope Benedict first introduced this concept of the 'ecology of man' and its importance to the pro-life movement:

The Church must also protect man from self-destruction. What is needed is something like a human ecology, correctly understood.

"If the Church speaks of the nature of the human being as man and woman, and demands that this order of creation be respected, this is not some antiquated metaphysics. What is involved here is faith in the Creator and a readiness to listen to the "language" of creation. To disregard this would be the self-destruction of man himself, and hence the destruction of God's own work."

"Rain forests deserve indeed to be protected, but no less so does man, as a creature having an innate "message" which does not contradict our freedom, but is instead its very premise."

I think Pope Benedict is telling us something very important, that we need to set our defence of the sanctity of life within the wider perspective of 'the ecology of man' in order to proclaim the Gospel of Life to our contemporaries.

As never before mankind is aware of the awesome beauty and intricate complexity of the natural world. One just has to recall the photographs of our blue pearl of a planet taken by astronauts from space or the majestic, vivid images of galaxies and stars taken by the Hubble telescope.

The Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* answers perfectly those who ask the question faced with these, 'what is man's place in nature? *Gaudium et Spes* 12 answers, 'Man is the centre and crown of creation' because created "to the image of God," man is capable of knowing and loving his Creator.

Gaudium et Spes 22 goes on to say that man is the centre and crown of creation because through His incarnation 'the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man'

'He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.'

Let's think about this for a few moments. Through taking on a human nature, a human body in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God, has united Himself with every woman, man, and child on this planet. By sharing in the same human nature as Jesus every human being born is somehow joined to the divine-human life of the Son of God who took flesh in the immaculate flesh of Mary, the Mother of God.

This means that each human person conceived shares in a triple dignity:

- Made in the Image of God
- The centre and crown of all creation
- Joined to Jesus Christ, the eternal begotten Son of God, through his incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This is why all people that sincerely care about nature, and that seek to protect the environment from being destroyed should care about the destruction of the pre-born child by abortion. Every time a child is killed through abortion a person who is created by God as the centre and crown of all creation is destroyed. This is why abortion is the greatest crime against the natural world, against the environment.

This is why all Christians that sincerely care about human dignity and human rights should care about euthanasia and assisted suicide. Every time a vulnerable person's heart is stopped by drugs or the withdrawal of fluids or food, a person who is united with the humanity of the Son of God is unjustly and sinfully tortured and killed. This is why euthanasia and assisted suicide is the greatest crime against humanity.

This is why all Catholics, and all people of good will, who defend human life through their support of the pro-life movement are the most radical environmentalists and most radical advocates of human rights. The most endangered ecosystem on the planet is the mother's womb and the most endangered human right is the right to life of our most vulnerable citizens. Protecting the ecology of man from destruction by abortion and euthanasia should be the foremost concern of every human institution and government, in fact of every ecological group such as Green Peace and Friends of the Earth and every Human Rights group such as Amnesty International.

But tragically for the future of life on this planet, the ecological movement and human rights movement are often the loudest advocates of so called 'reproductive rights', which as we know is just a cynical euphemism for killing unborn children.

The world needs reminding that Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right to life of every person. All are entitled to the rights of Freedom set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind.

It is deplorable that so many states choose to allow the unborn child to be a victim and targeted for killing - a barbaric & evil practice. We must stand firm in our call for respect for human life from natural conception to natural death.

5.

To conclude I want to return our attention to the fact that we have come here to Walsingham, the site of the Shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth.

The moment Mary gave her 'fiat', her consent to the Archangel Gabriel's message that she was to be the Mother of God, she went in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist.

This is what Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote of that meeting between the pregnant Mary and the pregnant Elizabeth: 'And the unborn child, John the Baptist, rejoiced in Elizabeth's womb. How wonderful it was - Almighty God chose an unborn child to announce the coming of His Son'.

And when Elizabeth felt her baby son rejoice in her womb, when she felt him announce the coming of God's son, she longed for Messiah, she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

'Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among

women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb'. (Luke 1:41 -42)

In response to Elizabeth's exultation of praise, the joy of baby John the Baptist, and her awareness of baby Jesus, the Son of God, in her own womb, Mary proclaims her great canticle of rejoicing, the Magnificat.

The thing to remember here is that Mary sings out her great hymn of praise in the presence of four others, Elizabeth, baby John, baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who - as we acknowledge in the Nicene Creed - is the Giver of Life.

As such, the Magnificat is one of the fundamental sources of the Gospel of Life and the pro-life movement. The Magnificat is God's manifesto for a Marian revolution, for Mary's revolution, which is more powerful, more dynamic, more radical than Karl Marx's manifesto, or any other man-made, political manifesto.

This is what Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote about Mary's revolution contained in the Magnificat:

It is remarkable how Mary begins her Magnificat with her personal experiences and soon passes on to identify herself with the whole human race. She looks ahead and sees what the effect of the birth of her Son will be to the world, how it will improve the whole condition of human life, how it will free the oppressed, feed the hungry, and assist the helpless. And when she said these words, her Son was not yet born - although one would think, from the joy of the song that He was already in her arms. She is singing here a song of pure faith about something certain to happen because God will make it come true, not predicting the mere revolution of blind material forces.'

To begin to truly transform our society through this Marian revolution we don't need to form a political party, or lobby parliament, we need to start with our own hearts, the way we live our lives.

Again, this is how Fulton Sheen puts it:

'Happy are they who experience, within themselves, the expelling of pride and egotism, and in whom spiritual hunger is fed -- who discover, before it is too late, that they are poor, and naked, and blind, and who seek to clothe themselves with the raiment of grace that her Son brings'.

Simply put, we need to make Mary's Magnificat our own, our pattern for living life, so that the revolution of Mary transforms us and our families, our parishes and our dioceses.

6.

Allow me to take three phrases from the Magnificat:

"He has used the power of His arm, He has routed the arrogant of heart"

For us to share in the life of Christ, and live like Him, is the death of pride. Pride was the first sin and the origin of all sin and it continues to be so.

When we allow the Holy Spirit, through the sacraments, prayer and fasting, to place our lives beside the life of Christ, sin's hold on our lives is loosened and we are freed. In Him we take on new life and become life.

We can only truly confront and challenge the evil of abortion and euthanasia, if we allow Christ to cast pride and arrogance from our hearts.

We long for Mary's moral revolution.

"He has pulled down Princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly."

There is no one more lowly in our society than the unborn child and the vulnerable sick and elderly.

There is no one more powerful in our society than the politician, medical professional, or journalist who is pro-abortion, and pro-euthanasia. They are the Princes of the Culture of Death that has been established in our country.

We know on whose side Jesus is don't we! The unborn child abandoned by his or her mother and father. The sick and elderly abandoned by their family.

During these times when the culture of death seems unstoppable, we must ask Mary to give us a share in her hope that the Lord will pull down today's Princes, and raise up to life all who are truly lowly.

We long for Mary's social revolution.

"He has filled the starving with good things and sent the rich away empty."

A non-Christian society thrives on acquiring wealth and hoarding it - money, property, a good name, the so-called 'good life'.

In this consumerist society human life has become a commodity that can be bought and sold.

The abortion industry in this country makes £60 million a year from the Department of Health for killing 200,000 unborn children

Embryonic children have been killed and harvested to produce lines of stem cells for the pharmaceutical industry to make vast profits.

Thousands of teenage mothers are pressurised into having abortions by the State to ensure that they don't claim social housing and benefits. Money is seen as being more important than a child's life.

A Christian, fully human society is one that puts the needs of the most vulnerable first, that values human life more than the balance sheet.

We long for Mary's economic revolution.

7.

Let me finish by quoting from Blessed John Paul's prophetic encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, in which he writes about the Marian revolution that started when Mary met Elizabeth in the presence of baby John and baby Jesus:

The value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children whom they are carrying in the womb. It is precisely the children who reveal the advent of the Messianic age: in their meeting, the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God among men first becomes operative.'

Let us pray that the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God that first became manifest at the meeting between two pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth, may transform our lives as witnesses and teachers of the Gospel of Life.

And may Our Lady of Walsingham safeguard and defend our homes as sanctuaries for life.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.