



## **Homily - Mass for the Day of the Unborn Child**

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In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we learn that, in creating humanity, God creates us in the divine image and likeness. As we reflect this morning on the gift of life and, in particular, on the fragility, vulnerability and preciousness of life in the womb, it is good to remember that the divinely inspired scriptures, read within the context of our Catholic faith, are a sure guide to help us come to know God better and to understand more fully what God is asking of us.

The Book of Genesis tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God, but it does so only after a long presentation of God as the creator and source of all life. We see God creating the sun and the moon, the earth and all that lives upon it: the plants, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, all animals wild and tame. Science may tell us how God created all these things. It is the Bible that assures us, with the assurance of our faith, that it is indeed God who did and does create them.

What we see in this story of creation is the profound truth that the God in whose image we are made is a creating, life-giving God. What follows from this is that we are most truly fulfilling our God-given vocation when our lives are at the service of life. The opposite is also true – we are least like God and, indeed, radically unfaithful to our divinely given vocation, when our lives are not at the service of life but, rather, at the service of death.

There are many ways of being at the service of life, just as there are many way of being at the service of death. Jesus Himself makes this very clear when He says to us, in Matthew's Gospel:

*“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire (Matt 5:21-22).*

In Jesus' mind, an angry word or a vicious insult reveals a heart that is not in harmony with the life-giving God. Rather, it reveals a heart which is ready to diminish life rather than enhance it, a heart which is prepared to bring sorrow rather than joy, a heart which wants to wound rather than heal. If the deliberate destruction of a human life is the most horrific example of a disregard for the dignity and preciousness of life, the hardness of heart which leads us to bring suffering to others is also a sign that we are not being faithful to our call to be the living images of God in His world. On a day when we are celebrating the gift of life, and reflecting in sorrow on the terrible destruction of life in the womb, it is good for us to recognise how often, in so many ways,



we ourselves are not true servants of life. And, in the light of this, of course, we must ask the Lord to give us the gift of His Spirit to teach us how to be true servants of life.

Reflection on the early chapters of the Book of Genesis also teaches us another truth, one which Pope St John Paul II highlighted often. Because God is a Trinity of life-giving love, to be made in the divine image is to be made for relationships, made for communion, both with God and with each other. The Book of Genesis highlights very strongly the destructive power of sin in this regard. When Cain kills his brother Abel and God asks Cain where his brother is, Cain replies, with an arrogance which indicates that his relationship with God is already breaking down, "Am I my brother's keeper?" For Cain, the answer to the question is "No, of course you are not your brother's keeper". For God, the answer is exactly the opposite. "Of course you are your brother's keeper. Both you and he are made in my image. Both you and he must protect the life which is my gift to you both. How can you be what I have created you to be if you are disdainful of the worth and dignity of another person?"

Before Cain physically murdered his brother, we might say that he had, in his heart, already killed Abel. His jealousy of Abel had hardened his own heart and had blinded him to the dignity and the value of his brother's life. Once this had died in Cain's heart, it was just a small step to the violence which erupted and destroyed Abel's life.

Hardness of heart is a terrible thing. It destroys relationships, it destroys families, it destroys societies, and it destroys lives. At this time, when we are so close to the celebration of Easter, we are reminded that it destroyed Jesus Himself. Or, rather, it tried its hardest to do so. But God is greater than any hardness of heart and can turn destruction into life. This is what Easter is all about.

We are people who want to be servants of life. We are people who want to be protectors of the innocent and defenders of the helpless. We know that we are indeed our brother's keeper. And as we become, more and more, compassionate as our heavenly Father is compassionate, so we will be true servants of life and effective signs and bearers of God's love for His people. We will be the prophets of hope and of life that God is asking us to be. May today's celebration of Mass deepen in us our commitment to this great vocation.