

Ash Wednesday



Archbishop
Alfred C.
HUGHES

This weekend, Mardi Gras comes to its culmination. I hope that you will have the opportunity for some family-friendly fun. We all need to party occasionally.

Then, on Wednesday, we will begin Lent. This is the annual retreat which the Church presents to us. What a wonderfully graced opportunity!

There is a rather special fascination with ashes on Ash Wednesday. We Catholics (and in increasing number, Protestants) come by the thousands to be marked as public penitents.

In an increasingly secular

culture, how remarkable! Christians unashamed to let the world know who we are. We come, the devout and the less than devout, to be reminded of our mortality and our need to embrace the demands of the Gospel more fully. In this simple act, we pledge to increase our prayer, to discipline our appetites, to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent, and to be more gener-

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ous to the needy. Hopefully, we commit ourselves to do it unobtrusively as the Gospel urges us to do.

Ashes are a symbol. The cynic may suggest it as only an empty gesture. But on Ash Wednesday we want that symbol to mean the change of heart in life called for by

the Lord Jesus in his recurring message: "Repent and believe the Good News!"

Instinctively, and perhaps inarticulately, we know exactly what we are doing when we approach the sanctuary to be marked with ashes. We know there is something broken within us, a selfish sinfulness we are willing to acknowledge publicly on Ash Wednesday.

Ashes speak for themselves ... without a word. To those

who see an ash-smudged forehead, the ashes say: "Here is a Christian who wants to be penitent." To us who wear them, the ashes say: "Let my Lenten discipline begin."

As we move into Lent let us carve out more quiet time for prayer, embrace a discipline that counteracts our strongest inclinations to sin and a generosity with our resources to help those most in need. God grant us a holy retreat!

Pro-lifer at U.N.: 'I would rather be on our side'



Peter
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CLARION HERALD

On the surface, there hasn't been a lot of encouraging news for pro-life Catholics, who in the first month of President Obama's administration have witnessed an erosion of even modest gains in the protection of unborn human life.

Among the first executive orders President Obama signed on Jan. 23 – just three days after his inauguration and the day after hundreds of thousands of pro-lifers gathered in Washington for the annual March for Life – overturned the Mexico City Policy that for the last eight years had denied federal funding of private organizations that promote and perform abortion overseas.

On another front, the uncertain health of United States Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the advanced age of Justice John Paul Stevens, who will turn 89 on April 20, make it possible that President Obama will have a chance to nominate one or more candidates to the high court during his term.

Such uncertain prospects for advancing the pro-life cause have not discouraged Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, the only pro-life and pro-family "non-governmental organization" within the United Nations.

"I would much rather be on our side than on their side," Ruse said. "They are surrounded."

Say what?

Ruse, who was in New Orleans earlier this week to speak to the pro-life clubs of local universities, paints a picture of an abortion culture that is fundamentally bereft of moral underpinnings.

"The rule of insurgencies is that if they do not wither away, they will eventually win," Ruse said. "The insurgency of the pro-life movement has done much more than stay alive. It has thrived."

This was all supposed to have been settled 36 years ago with the promulgation of the twin Supreme Court decisions Roe vs. Wade and Doe vs. Bolton. Absolutely nothing has been as unsettled since.

Ruse paints the picture of the "typical" abortion doctor: "You're a late middle-aged man who never gets to know your patients and doesn't care to.

In the beginning you saw yourself as a hero in the fight for women's rights, but now years later as you travel a circuit of clinics, your unknown patients lying prone on table after table, the luster of your work has faded.

"Every day you walk through a phalanx of protestors praying for you to stop your work and trying to persuade your patients to walk away. A few doors away or across the street sits a pregnancy help center that has a new sonogram machine, which is opening a door to your secret world and turning women against you. ... Your landlord doesn't want you as a tenant. Your state Leg-

islature passes new laws every year that hurt your business. Your home phone is unlisted and your medical colleagues shun you."

Ruse said the insurgency is chipping away at the "great big rock called Roe vs. Wade," and to do it the insurgency has had to become creative.

"The pro-life movement is almost like the Holy Spirit blowing across the land, and millions of ideas are springing forth," Ruse said. "There's a student from UCLA who thought up the idea of going undercover into a clinic with hidden microphones, recording clinic staffers saying things that will be aired later on 'The O'Reilly Factor.' There are the women who started the 'Silent No More' campaign. Students are spending entire summers walking across America to draw attention to the issue. Another kid started the '40 Days for Life' prayer and fasting campaign, which is sweeping the nation."

The pro-life insurgency, Ruse said, must fight in the trenches, one heart and one mind at a time.

"Science has helped," Ruse said. "The first baby picture you put on your refrigerator invariably is a picture of your unborn baby. When people see enough of these, it changes hearts and minds. Medical treatment to unborn children has changed minds. Post-abortive women talking about how abortion has harmed them has changed hearts and minds."

The most important message for pro-life Catholics is to get involved in their parish pro-life ministry and to

become vocal when taxpayer funds are used to promote the abortion license.

"One of the things that absolutely unites people on all sides of the pro-life divide is that nobody believes federal dollars should go to the funding of abortion," Ruse said. "But the Mexico City Policy does precisely that. This is from a man who says he wants to reduce the 'reasons' or the 'need' for abortion."


Ruse said the irony in a land founded on the principles of securing "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is that the U.S. has "the most radical abortion laws in the whole world through all nine months. Nobody else comes close, except maybe China."

Many of the people in the U.N. building, especially from European nations, "despise" his pro-life group.

"But we have a lot of friends, including a fifth column of Filipino secretaries who go to Mass every day who love us," he said. "There are delegations from the Caribbean, Central America, the Middle East and from Muslim states who are very friendly. The other side has tried to make abortion a universally accepted right in U.N. documents, and they have lost because we have stopped them."

"I travel all over the world, and people marvel at the U.S. pro-life movement because it is so big, diverse and effective," Ruse said. "The long-term prognosis for our movement is very good. The rock of Roe vs. Wade has forced us to do things that change hearts."

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