

Archbishop Eamon Martin

Message for Day for Life 2016

Sunday, 2 October 2016



Pope Francis often speaks about the need for a ‘revolution of tenderness’ to melt the ‘hardness of heart’ that is so prevalent in today’s world. Nowadays the way of tenderness is indeed counter-cultural and revolutionary. It is perhaps the only way to confront inhumanity and cruelty, to bridge the great divide which greed has created between the rich and the poor, and to expose the pervasive ‘throwaway culture’ which surrounds us.

The ‘revolution of tenderness’ challenges us to show real sensitivity and active concern for everyone and everything, and protect the wonder of life in our common home. As Pope Francis puts it: ‘everything is connected’. This includes the way we care for the environment; how we care for one another; how we welcome and accept those with different needs and abilities, refugees, the elderly, the unborn, the forgotten and the abandoned; how we acknowledge the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities (see *Laudato si'* 117).

These days as I listen to repeated calls for repeal of the Eighth Amendment in the Constitution of Ireland, I cannot help observing one of the great contradictions of our age: that, at the same time as society is developing a more urgent sense of the need to care for our planet and other creatures, many seem determined to remove the right to life of unborn human beings.

The Eighth Amendment reads as follows:

“The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right”.

It is therefore fundamentally a declaration of tenderness and love for the equal right to life of both a mother and her unborn child. It is an undertaking to respect, defend and vindicate that right here in Ireland. This amendment is precious and wonderful – it places as the very foundations and substructure of our laws a clear conviction that all human life is worth cherishing.

Demands to quash and abolish this amendment go against the Good News that the life of every person is sacred and inviolable, irrespective of the stage or state of that life - from the first moment of conception until the moment of natural death. This is the most fundamental of all moral principles. It is the basis upon which every human right

we enjoy as persons is predicated and upon which our very freedom and dignity as a person rests. It admits of no exceptions. To deliberately and intentionally take the life of an innocent person, whatever their state or stage of life, is always gravely morally wrong.

From a moral point of view, there is therefore no such thing as 'limited' abortion. The medical prognosis for the life of a child in the womb, or the extent of that child's disabilities, is no more morally relevant than it is when considering an adult who faces the diagnosis of a life-limiting condition.

Today I call on all those who believe in a better future for humanity to preserve the dignity and sanctity of human life in all its stages and conditions, as an affirmation of our human capacity for tenderness and love. We must not forget of course that some mothers and fathers experience profound anguish when faced with a crisis in pregnancy. Tenderness also compels us to reach out to them. That is why I wish to repeat today the call for our politicians to provide every possible service and support to women, parents and families who are faced with severe difficulties and crises in pregnancy. This must include a commitment to providing comprehensive peri-natal hospice services for women and their families responding to a diagnosis of life-limiting disability for their unborn child.

Thirty seven years ago today in Limerick, Pope St John Paul II said:

“May Ireland never weaken in her witness, before Europe and before the whole world, to the dignity and sacredness of all human life, from conception until death (1 October 1979)”.

That remains my prayer on this Day for Life 2016.

Prayer

A prayer to deepen our wonder at the gift of life from Laudato si':

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

That we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live

as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

Amen.