



**Most Reverend Robert W. Finn**  
**Bishop**  
**Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

**Spiritual Strategies for Building the Civilization of Life**  
**St. Helena Church - Minneapolis, Minnesota**

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Dear Friends,

I am grateful for your invitation to come to the Archdiocese of St. Paul – Minneapolis and to address you this evening in this conference which seeks to honor and protect human life and promote the family. As you know my participation is a reschedule, thanks to the kindness and perseverance of your organizers.

On the prior occasion when I had planned to be with you, your former priest and auxiliary bishop, Robert Carlson, was being installed as Metropolitan Archbishop of St. Louis – my boss actually! As bishop of one of the three dioceses which are under Archbishop Carlson in the St. Louis Province, I very much wanted to be with him. Bishops face many challenges – as does human life; as does the family. Our solidarity and fraternity as bishops is a very important part of prospering the work of protecting life and family. Anyway, thanks for not giving up on me. I am glad to be here.

As I composed this talk I was aware that it might come in the very climactic days of the battle on Health Care Reform. President Obama is intent on keeping his promise that he would accomplish some change in our nation's program of health care early in his administration. I believe, as does the bishops' conference as a whole, that there is room for reform in health care. I wish I had more creative insight in how it might be changed for the better: to assure more individuals and families access to affordable care; to make sure that health care is about health and not about contraception, abortion or end-of-life counseling. We do not want to face the dilemma of whether we can pay our taxes when they may be used to fund such destructive activities. Like you, I want a system in which our Catholic employers and/or our Catholic hospitals and clinics will have conscience protection. We must be able to continue to serve the basic needs of so many poor, including immigrants. As a diocese which employs thousands of people, I must be able to draw a line in the coverage I offer.

When, last August, my neighbor Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City Kansas, and I wrote a letter about the ***Principles of Catholic Teaching and Health Care***, we determined to do just that: to lay out some fundamental beliefs in an admittedly limited way. This was necessary because the terms of "health care reform" were changing moment by moment. As this debate continues, it is tragic that the goals and elements of the reform remain unclear, hidden to a degree in the mammoth size of the bill. Creative and necessary collaboration has been almost impossible because of partisan bullying and the special interests that both parties so often have decried. I only hope the strong displeasure of citizen constituents comes sooner rather than later.

It seems likely that a significant correction will occur in the next congressional election cycle. The critical question is this: Will it be too late to fully reverse the damage and destruction caused by the passage of a legislative proposal that more deeply institutionalizes abortion, which builds a new bridge toward euthanasia, which does little to reduce health care costs and

further inflates an immoral deficit? Can government effectively oversee another significant aspect of people's lives? Are there less sweeping modifications to make within the current system that can nonetheless bring down costs and open access to anyone who is ready to make a priority investment in quality health for themselves and their families? In the end, dear friends, you know the answer to these questions better than me. You are the experts in medicine, human resources, business and finance, insurance and law, and even the constant work of charity.

More and more, I am coming to believe in the primacy of the need for conscience protection as the "failsafe" strategy for preserving a morally viable health care system. We must still hold out insistently for the abortion exclusion. It is wrong to compromise in this regard. In their recent statements, the Catholic Health Association is all too ready to trust that we can somehow "fix" abortion after a bill is passed. Their recommendation to allow the passage of the critically flawed Senate bill is clearly at odds with the U.S. Bishops Conference and every pro-life group in this country. Their permissive stance diminishes the potential that Catholic solidarity might have in requiring the abortion prohibition and other essential elements in a morally sound proposal. If the Catholic Health Association claims to represent Catholic Hospitals they should keep in mind that, as a bishop, so do I represent the Catholic Hospitals within my diocese. Even now they should loudly and publicly reverse their stance and stand with the Catholic Bishops – and the Bishops Committees on Pro-Life Activities, on Justice, Peace and Human Development, and on Migration - in opposing this bill, at least until explicit protections and provisions are included.

When all is said and done, I believe there are so many troublesome features in this reform effort that our last final hope is that we can have a legal choice to live some way outside of it; that we will have the freedom to secure a system that protects our beliefs in the primacy of human life and the dignity of every person.

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> American century, the public "free" school system had become so antagonistic to Catholicism as to move the Church to an extraordinary unanimity of purpose. The United States bishops, gathered in plenary sessions at the several Councils of Baltimore would decide, by 1884, that we needed to create our own system of Catholic schools in order to protect the integrity of the educational and faith formation of youth. We must not too quickly forfeit our Catholic clout in the determination of a system of health care which preserves the authentic meaning and purpose of the human person. We, as Catholics, have already invested so much in hospitals and clinics, in the constant care of the sick and poor – significantly more than any other single private or faith-based entity in our country. We have a right to a say in what happens.

Having said all of this as preamble and context, tonight I have chosen to speak about some of the deeper realities that make our work so challenging. As corporeal beings, and as persons who have the care of families with daily needs, it is clear that we cannot ignore the realities of our human situation.

Still, we are sons and daughters of a heavenly Father, indeed "co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) to the glories of heaven. We live in this world as integral persons with bodies and immortal souls, as subjects who constantly make free decisions and must do so from both reason and faith. We are; we remain, the Church Militant, and as such we are engaged in a constant battle for the salvation of our souls. This is not a physical militancy. Our status as Church Militant does not justify malice or violence, but rather, requires us to acknowledge, prayerfully,

peacefully, but with great fortitude and unwavering faith, that we are in a constant struggle with forces that are contrary to our human nature redeemed by grace. Christ has won this struggle once for all in His dying and rising, but we still participate in it day to day.

This evening I would also wish to offer some Spiritual Strategies for winning in the battle or battles we face. We are called in holiness not only to defend against what is wrong, but to actively construct a civilization of life and love. If we are to “win” this battle in God’s eyes – and that is what counts, everything we do has to be in accord with the direction He lays out in His Word and the discipline of the Church.

So what are the realities that require such strategic action on our part?

The first has to do with the battles of this life; what we are up against each day, and what we would be foolish to ignore.

About a year ago I gave a talk to our local pro-life convention on “spiritual warfare,” with some applications to the challenges of the pro-life movement. I said, as I still believe, that we face a daily battle.

In a couple of weeks we will stand together at Easter Mass and renew our baptismal promises. We will be called to renounce Satan and all his works and empty promises. As a bishop, I stand in front of a group of young people, Confirmation candidates, nearly sixty times a year and invite them to renew their Baptismal promises: to renounce the evil one and live in the freedom of the children of God. It takes only a cursory examination of conscience to realize that we are engaged in a constant warfare with Satan, with the glamour of evil, and the lure of false truths and empty promises. These are not my words but the age old and wise formula of the Church. Friends, all is not rosy or easy in our effort to follow Jesus. The Church knows this. If we fail to realize how constantly these forces work against us, we are more likely to fall, and even chance forfeiting God’s gift of eternal life. The evil one never rests.

So this is the first fact that we mustn’t forget, though we don’t want to be overpowered by it, or lose hope. The fact which is even more important is that Jesus Christ, in His life, death and resurrection has already won the war: definitively and once for all. Our battle is about remaining faithful to Jesus the Victor, and clinging to the truth that wins no matter what.

If you and I fail to grasp the meaning and finality behind our choices, and the intensity of the constant warfare that confronts us, it is likely that we will drop our guard, be easily and repeatedly deceived, and even lose our eternal soul.

In this spiritual warfare our enemy is the devil, Satan. Human beings are not Satan, yet we know from our own failings and bitter experiences he can influence us and other people, twisting and confounding God’s will.

Because of our wounded nature we can easily be misled by the lies of the evil one. He doesn’t play fair, and we – you and I – are all too ready to believe his lies. We rationalize what we want even when in our heart of hearts we know what we want is wrong. “I can take a few things from work. I can spend a little time on the internet sites to let out my frustration, or to ease my loneliness. Then, ... I can cheat on my spouse; don’t I have a right to be happy? I am in such a desperate situation; Jesus knows I am not ready to be a parent; Let’s end this pregnancy before it gets very far along. Abortion is the law of the land. Even though I personally

oppose abortion and am sickened by it, I was elected to serve the will of the people. I am a good Catholic. I go to Mass every single Sunday and receive communion” Satan is a liar. He prompts our rationalizations. He doesn’t give up. We have to be aware of this.

So what are the rules of this spiritual warfare? Let’s be clear: we are talking about a spiritual attentiveness and fortification. We are not talking about violence against others. We are talking about persevering efforts – prayerful, peaceful.

For these interior battles we have to build ourselves up interiorly. We have to “fortify” ourselves with daily examination of conscience, frequent Confession, and worthy Communion. And we must listen to the voice of the Church: The Holy Father and the bishops in union with him. This “rock,” the authentic magisterium, has to be our constant reference point. We can read the lives of the saints to learn heroic virtue.

We must seek strength and direction in the life of prayer and sacraments, in the teachings of the Church. Parents must take this work of spiritual strengthening as a goal for themselves and their families. They must plan and strategize – not so much to save their children from every temptation – it cannot be done. But rather they must teach them the importance of prayer by praying with them often. They must frequent Mass and the sacraments together as a family so that this priority is obvious in the home. Husbands and wives must learn the strengths and weaknesses of each of their children, to see what virtues are best suited to each, and what the vulnerabilities and needs of each might be. They will strategize on how to give each one “his own,” that which he or she justly deserves and needs. What is the goal? To help each member fulfill their call to holiness, and to get each to heaven.

The second reality I want to speak about this evening is what we could call “the crisis of holiness” or more specifically “the crisis of grace.”

In order to live in God’s life and to exercise our filial adoption – that is, our life as a son or daughter, we must remain in the “state of sanctifying grace.” This is so fundamental: At Baptism, God shares His life with us. He gives us a participation in the life of the Trinity, God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we live with this life, we can do amazing things. This is the doctrine of grace which was largely rejected by Luther and the Reformers. Jesus Christ redeemed the world by his life, death and resurrection.

By Baptism we become, according to St. Paul, a “new creation.” (2 Cor 5:17) We live with God’s life. If we are alive with God’s life and we act out of a motive of love of Christ, our acts of charity are meritorious, that is, helpful to our salvation and that of others. This is an amazing truth! St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, says that “to pick up a pin off the floor for love of God, can save a soul!” Isn’t that wondrous? She is a Doctor of the Church. She knows the workings of grace and God’s desire that you and I are called to be co-workers with Himself; participants in the very work of redemption. St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)

But we must ask ourselves: “Am I alive in God’s grace?” Surveys say that many Catholics do not participate in Holy Mass every Sunday and Holy Day. How many Catholic couples are contracepting? I was asked by some faithful of my diocese to write a Pastoral Letter on purity and the dangers of pornography. The statistics are staggering – the number of people, young and old, male and female, viewing pornography, addicted to the gratifications of pornography.

These things are all, objectively speaking, serious or “mortal” sins. Can they be forgiven? Of course they can. But the lines for Confession do not seem to be getting longer.

The result seems to be this: We have many people walking around without sanctifying grace. They may even be, by all accounts, “good people,” but if we are not alive with God’s grace, we cannot participate in the supernatural work of God. Our good acts – outside the state of grace – may be humanly helpful. We may ease the sufferings of earthquake victims in Haiti. We may give some good example to our spouse, our co-workers. I may help to pass life-giving legislation. But if I do not live with a share in God’s life then my good acts cannot have the supernatural dimension and power that God wants them to have.

Here is the point: if the world is a battleground in the supernatural realm, we need to be holy warriors. In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul makes for us a very important distinction. “Put on the armor of God, in order that you can stand firm against the tactics of the devil. ..For our struggle,” St Paul tells us, “is not with flesh and blood but with principalities, with the powers, with the rulers of this darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.” (Eph 6:10-12) Friends, if we are not acting in the realm of grace, we are fighting with “nerf” arrows. We are trying to hold off the real enemies of our souls with collapsing daggers.

If we want to be really effective in our efforts we must be “attached” and “connected” to the source of life. In the image of the vine and the branches, Jesus tells us, “Apart from me you are like a dry and withered branch. You can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5) Attached and connected to Christ we can do great things. We can do so much more. Where are we in regard to this – what I call the – crisis of grace?

One of my favorite modern day saints says that if we are trying to help someone, to turn their heart; if you are trying to reach your wayward son or daughter, or your boss, or your legislator, we have to pray first, then do mortifications, and only then act or talk. I have decided on my own formula: 70% prayer and penance – 30% talking or action. Pray, pray , pray first; then do what you can. But even before prayer, if you want to be supernaturally effective, make sure – through a good confession – you are in the State of Grace. Get re-connected! And take this step as a family. Build habits of using Confession frequently. There is so much help that God can give us in avoiding the sins that have been destructive in our life.

In the Health Care battle we have to do all that we can, morally, on a human sphere, but don’t for a moment underestimate the necessity of prayer or the effectiveness of a supernatural source of light and help.

The third and last thing I want to share with you tonight has to do with the vocation to holiness which is specific to the lay faithful.

We are all called to holiness – clergy, religious, and laity. We are all invited to share the life of God and also in the work of the Church – each according to our proper station in life. The priest teaches, leads, and sanctifies in accord with the grace of his ordination. He stands in the **person of Christ** to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on behalf of the people, and to apply the fruits of the sacrifice for the salvation of souls, living and dead. He awaits sinners in the Confessional to express the mercy of God to those who turn to Him. As priests we have the most wonderful privilege of being with people at the joyous and sorrowful moments of their lives: birth and baptism; marriage and ordination; anointing and death. We have a grace of the Holy Spirit for preaching the Word of God.

Religious men and women, by their consecration to God and the sign of their community life, live apart from the world but completely in its service. By following the charisms of their founders they extend the charity of Christ in contemplation or in apostolic life. They are extraordinary living representations of the bride of Christ, the Church.

The lay faithful are also called to holiness – specifically within the world. There is a Royal Priesthood of the Lay Faithful, which the Second Vatican Council reminded us was different than the ordained priesthood not only in degree but in essence. (Lumen Gentium, no. 10) Nonetheless the priestly soul of each baptized member of the laity calls him or her to offer meritorious sacrifice and intercession for themselves and all the world. We have already noted how important it is that we remain in living union with Jesus Christ through sanctifying grace. If so, our actions can have a supernatural effectiveness and promote the work of saving souls.

The authentic call of the lay faithful is to bring their faith to bear on all aspects of the secular world, and to actively bring about its transformation. In every field of endeavor: law, science, education, politics, media and communications, labor, the laity can move forward the goal of sanctification – of making holy all the works that man is called to carry out.

The late great Pope John Paul II spoke of the culture of death in which we find ourselves in many ways. He said we must be engaged actively and consciously in the cultivation and prospering of a civilization of life and love, as intended by God.

While the priest must be willing to do his part for the sanctification of the whole people of God, especially through the announcement of the Gospel, the integral teaching of the truth as revealed by God and preserved by the Church in the deposit of faith, the laity must act in grace and holiness to turn all the ordinary duties and everyday circumstances and events of life into occasions of loving God and serving the Church.

In the aftermath of the Council, some aspects of this message got lost. Through what was sometimes a misinterpretation of the notion of the “Priesthood of the Faithful,” some attempted to usurp the role proper to the clergy. We learned that, if we want to be truly involved in the work of the Church, we should become lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, lay ministers in Church offices, catechists in RCIA and school or religion. Is there anything wrong with these things? – Certainly not! Are they not a necessary part of the work of the parish and the contribution of stewardship and participation in the life of the Church? Clearly they are. Nearly every agency director in my diocese and in every other diocese are lay men and women, well educated and committed to the Church; so also in our parishes. I don’t want to suggest that these roles are unnecessary or misguided or in any way inappropriate.

However, this “church work” is and will engage a relatively small representation of the laity – perhaps less than 5% of lay Catholics could be said to work or even volunteer for the Church. Perhaps in some places it is as much as 10%. What about the remainder of the laity? I fear that so much emphasis on this kind of direct participation in the everyday functions associated with the parish or diocese has taken emphasis away from the crucial work of changing our culture and our society “from the inside out.” I would even go so far as to say that we as Church leaders have placed so much importance on this manner of calling people to be co-workers in the vineyard, that we have possibly stalled the implementation of the Council’s most significant call – the universal call to holiness, and the call to active apostolate in the world - by decades.

The tug of war over “who’s in charge:” the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the

clergy, has in some ways kept us from seeing the beauty of the authentic lay vocation within the Church.

It is the extraordinary vocation of the lay faithful to infuse all the areas of secular society with supernatural faith and obedience to the truth. If you don't do it, no one will probably succeed in your place. You sit in the business board room, on the medical ethics committee, the editorial boards, and the law bench. Even more work in field and factory. You teach. You are salesmen. You run small businesses and restaurants. You drive trucks and taxis. You take carloads of kids to school, and practices. You create the formative environment of the home. I believe this: in every one of these ways – in every common circumstance - you must build holiness in yourself and others. Don't live a separated life where what you do daily is spiritually divided from what you profess on Sunday. What we know and believe, what Jesus taught, is meant to be lived.

To do this holy work, we have to ask God to make us holy and then do everything for Him, to please Him, to honor and glorify Him. If you were asked to cook dinner for the Pope, you would want it to be perfect. If were asked to provide the artistic details of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in your parish church, you would give it all your expertise and attention. So much more, we must view all that we do every day as something for God. Raise your children for God. This is the measure of ultimate success worth achieving.

Enact laws that you would be ready to explain before God. Write news stories that express the truth but do not sensationalize or mislead. Make medical decisions in accord with the Church and worth and the dignity of the human person. Build “widgets” that fulfill their function in a way that contributes to man's hope.

Tonight as we have gathered for this evening affirming human life and the family I have offered not so much a political strategy as a spiritual reminder. We are children of our Father in heaven. We are members of the Church Militant striving with all our mind, heart, soul, and strength to honor God and love our neighbor. We must be clever as snakes, but all the while remembering that we are participants in an apostolic task of enormous proportions. We can even move mountains if God so chooses to use us and we are faithful.

I have one last recommendation. It is about a “secret weapon” in the work of love; the Communion of Saints. First: I can hardly stand here so close to St. Joseph's day and fail to invoke him as protector of the family and patron of the Universal Church. If a vote on Health Care is to come on the eve of his Feast, may God receive our prayer that our elected leaders hold firm and refuse to enshrine a further sacrilege against human life.

With Joseph is one who, if possible, is even more dear: Mary. At the foot of the Cross our Savior gave her to you and me to be our mother. She is the short cut to God. Place yourself under her mantle and she will steer you safely. At her intercession you will come to know the heart of Jesus Christ and begin to grow in the purity of heart to obey Him.

Parents, turn to Mary and Joseph to keep you on track with your children. God gave His Son to them for a time, just as He has entrusted your dear sons and daughters to you only for a time.

Together with the whole Church – that great cloud of witnesses that transcends all ages and places – and living in the fortification of Christ's grace, may each one of us, and all of us together, be faithful in fulfilling our vocation to build a civilization of life and love.