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Respect Life Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

At the height of his public ministry, our Lord Jesus expressed the heart of His teaching on love with the unforgettable words: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*). As our Lord was about to offer His life for the salvation of all mankind, He taught us once again to love as He loves, without limit or boundary.

For over thirty years now, we have witnessed, in our nation, the tragic consequences of a culture which sanctions the killing of innocent human life. In the United States, the least of our brothers and sisters are the unborn children threatened by abortion, and the human embryos artificially produced to be destroyed as mere objects of research.

Today, in our State of Missouri, we witness a most disturbing advance of the culture of death with dire implications for our whole nation. Not only is human life deemed by many to be disposable, if unwanted, but a growing sector of society holds that *some human lives are expendable for the sake of the interests of others, and may even be generated in laboratories solely to be destroyed.*

Human cloning for research purposes embodies just such a belief. In cloning for research, human embryos are artificially created only to be destroyed in scientific and medical experiments. These cloned human beings are deliberately killed, at the earliest stage of their life for the sake of someone else's idea of "scientific progress" or "therapy."

The stage of human life at which the killing takes place makes no difference. No matter how big or small we are, we all begin our unique journey of life as a human embryo. Killing is killing, no matter how young or old the victim. And no human life, at any stage of its development, may ever be taken for the sake of someone else's gain. The teaching of Christ is and remains that every human life, at every stage of development, deserves our ultimate respect and protection.

On this coming November 7th, Missourians will be asked to vote on an amendment to enshrine in our State Constitution a right to clone and kill human life for the sake of supposed medical advancement. At first glance, the wording of Amendment 2 may sound like something good. It even appears to be a ban on cloning in Missouri. But the wording is deceptive. In fact, Amendment 2 creates a constitutional right for researchers to engage in human cloning for purposes of research.

It also leads to the exploitation of women. Human cloning for research requires women to risk their own health in supplying the eggs necessary for generating cloned human embryos. The artificial ovarian stimulation needed to make women produce the many needed eggs can lead to stroke, infertility, organ failure and even death. The women involved are used as a mere commodity, as a means to advance someone else's speculations about "progress."

Finally, this amendment would take resources away from proven research. Adult stem-cell research—including stem cells from umbilical cord blood, placenta and bone marrow – has shown itself to be extremely successful in treating dozens of human illnesses, and shows promise even for conditions such as spinal cord damage, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease. These cells can be obtained without any harm to the donor and without any violation of the moral law. Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in Saint Louis, for instance, has the second largest umbilical cord blood bank in the world.

Our late and most beloved Holy Father Pope John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*: “The use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person” (n. 63). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms the same teaching: “It is immoral to produce human embryos intended for exploitation as disposable biological material” (n. 2275).

Tragically, the proponents of the ballot initiative, known as Amendment 2, have succumbed to false thinking which reduces nascent human life to an object, to a commodity whose value is determined by the interests of technical advancement and corporate profit. At work here is the fundamental moral error, “the end justifies the means,” in its most heinous form. As committed Christians, we must oppose such false thinking with genuine Christian love, with adherence to the Truth which truly sets us free.

Does the Church’s total opposition to Amendment 2 mean that we are insensitive to those who believe such research will one day be the answer to their debilitating diseases? Not at all. On the contrary, we support the aggressive pursuit of stem-cell research which respects the moral law and has genuine promise.

When pressed for honest answers, many scientists now admit that the hope for cures from human cloning is very remote, and that the means to get there are highly impractical. The plain fact is that, despite years of concerted effort, embryonic stem cell research has never yet helped a single human patient, and even worldwide efforts to obtain stem cells from cloned human embryos have been mired in failure and fraud. By contrast, we stand in genuine solidarity with our brothers and sisters who suffer debilitating disease. We endorse medical research that does no harm to any human being on the pretext of helping another, and research which reverences and respects the dignity of all members of the human family, born and unborn.

In the face of such disturbing cultural trends—now hitting so close to home—none of us can remain indifferent. We Catholics in the state of Missouri must bring our knowledge of the moral truth to bear upon our choices, especially when participating in the democratic process. Our “least brethren” are depending upon us. Our Lord Jesus Christ is depending upon us. We must vote, and we must vote “NO” on Amendment 2.

Let us all pray, through the intercession of the Mother of God, under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, that all human life will be safeguarded and protected by the Constitution and laws of our beloved State of Missouri.

With heartfelt gratitude and the assurance of our constant prayer for each of you, we remain

Yours sincerely in Christ,

The Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of Saint Louis

The Most Reverend Robert W. Finn
Bishop of Kansas City-Saint Joseph

The Most Reverend John R. Gaydos
Bishop of Jefferson City

The Most Reverend John J. Leibrecht
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

The Most Reverend Robert J. Hermann
Auxiliary Bishop of Saint Louis

The Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland
Bishop Emeritus of Kansas City-Saint Joseph