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Pro-Life Convention - Overland Park, Kansas

Homily: Mass for Attendees at First Pro-Life Convention
April 12, 2008

Dear Friends in Christ,

Here are the words of the Good Shepherd in today's Gospel: "A thief comes only to steal, slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn 10:10)

Today we have gathered to study, encourage and inspire one another, and now, to pray. This most sublime worship has as its centerpiece the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ who lays down His life - offering it as an oblation to the Father - so that we might have life. He gives us a share in His own life through an interior grace. He nourishes our souls with His priceless Body and Blood. And in the saving event of His death and Resurrection, renewed here on the altar, He wins a victory - a victory of life over death - so that it will be crystal clear: We have a future, an eternal future - life in abundance.

This joyous promise of the risen Lord Jesus Christ comes with the sobering caution that there are also thieves and robbers. There are strangers whose voices we do not know and who have destructive purposes, intentions for personal gain. "A thief," Jesus says, "comes to steal, slaughter and destroy." This stark truth reminds us of how completely we depend on the voice of the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd knows the sheep, and within the heart of the sheep and the flock the voice of the Shepherd finds a resonance which must not be ignored.

Today we have been talking, not only about the high human and spiritual cost of artificial Contraceptives on marriages and relationships, but about the life-bringing effectiveness of NaPro Technology. We have not merely condemned the destruction of human embryos, and noted the absolute lack of success of human cloning and embryonic stem cell research, but documented the real promise of adult stem cell research.

We have not only unmasked the false mercy of euthanasia and assisted suicide to suffering brothers and sisters who are scared and hopeless, but how authentic solidarity with the suffering and the dying brings them hope and causes us to guarantee them the dignity and protection of the most ordinary care: food and water.

We cannot give in to the trap of dead end gratifications. Pornography enslaves and degrades the human person, but purity frees us, and purity of heart helps us see God. Society deserves protection from violent aggressors, but the death penalty remains unnecessary and is an inhuman alternative to personal conversion and the Christian meaning of justice.

Yes the Shepherd holds the promise of life and peace, but we know the thief will continue to prowl. The great Pope John Paul II described the reality of a culture of darkness and death,

even as he announced Christ's ultimate triumph of light and life.

Pope Benedict, in his encyclical on love, *Deus Caritas Est*, speaks powerfully of justice: The political battle to bring about justice belongs to the State, he said, but the Church cannot remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. And we must do even more. We must go through justice toward love.

"Love - Caritas, Charity - will always prove necessary, even in the most just society," the Pope writes. (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28) The Church's realm is love because the realm of man is love. Jesus the Shepherd who lays down His life is the image of the fully human person. God is love, and He has shared love with man!

Even in the most just society, love is necessary because, the Pope reminds us, "There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations . where help in the form of the concrete love of neighbor is indispensable." (*DCE* n. 28b) It is to this that the Shepherd calls us: love to fill another's loneliness, and love, also, to fill our eternal need to love; to give ourselves away in sacrifice, in the same way Christ gave Himself.

We are approaching an election time when we know the stakes are high, when the culture remains on the verge of crumbling. You and I must carefully calculate the positions and integrity of those who present themselves for leadership. There are few if any perfect candidates, but we cannot lay aside our responsibility to study the issues, understand the priorities, and analyze the rhetoric and records of candidates. The father of lies - the enemy of life, the devil, - seduced Eve, and too frequently he has caused you and me to give in to his false promises. We cannot be swayed by a charismatic speaker unless we carefully weigh his or her words and determine whether the "plan" the candidate proposes complements or contradicts God's plan for life.

In their recent statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the United States bishops acknowledge that, while we are not single-issue voters, there are some stances which are so repugnant in their attack on life and human love that they disqualify a candidate from our consideration. (no. 42). These stances - and the bishops use the examples of support for abortion and the promotion of racism - are so fundamentally flawed that they cannot be maintained in our society without bringing down the whole house of mankind.

We must be responsible not only to "do no harm." We have a vocation to do good; to construct, with God's grace and under the voice of the Shepherd, a dynamic civilization of life and light. We cannot easily absolve ourselves of a malformed conscience if, in fact, we ignore the priorities of intrinsic evils and fundamental choices; and if we ignore the voice of the Shepherd. He doesn't shrink from telling us there are thieves whose purpose includes stealing, slaughtering, and destroying. And we must not be afraid to name the evils in our midst - as our speakers have done so well today.

You and I have to heed St. Peter's preaching in today's First Reading, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Friends, I do not believe St. Peter is telling us to run from our responsibility, but to be "saved" by fortifying our self and one another in Jesus Christ. Let us persevere in the work of reviving our culture as we can; transforming it by deliberate right choices, drenched in prayer, and consistent with Peter's voice. Let us be ready and willing to make sacrifices and even to suffer - as Good Shepherds must - allowing God to use us as agents for the

transformation of our culture in Christ.

Let us listen closely, with obedient hearts, to Peter's successor, Pope Benedict XVI, this week as he speaks a word of life and truth to our country and to the world.

Thank you dear friends for being here for this very first joint "Gospel of Life" Convention. Thanks to Archbishop Joseph Naumann for his keynote this morning and for his hospitality today. Thanks to our speakers and our generous sponsors. Thanks to Adrienne Hynek and Ron Kelsey, their staffs and volunteers, our parish coordinators, and our many supportive clergy and Religious.

This most sublime worship has as its centerpiece the Sacrifice of the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ who lays down His life so that we might have life in abundance. We are called to be participants in His work and courageous witnesses to life. May our Blessed Mother, Virgin Mother of Guadalupe and Star of the New Evangelization guide us in the way of her Son.