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First Sunday of Advent
Stem Cells & Cloning
In collaboration with Missouri Bishops
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We begin our new Church year this weekend – the first Sunday in Advent – hearing from the Prophet Isaiah in our First Reading about the relationship between God our Father – and each of us as children of God. Isaiah – in an almost despairing tone – cries out to God, recognizing that God is our Father, and that we are like clay that God forms into human beings. Although God is forever – and always was and always is – Isaiah reminds us that we are formed from the elements of the earth by God our creator, and exist only through the grace of God.

The words of Isaiah remind us that God knows us from our very beginnings – that we are the work of his hands. Our faith teaches us that we belong to God from that very beginning of our existence – that God infuses each of us with a soul that establishes our distinct relationship with God among all his earthly creatures, and marks each of us as children of God from our very beginning. This notion of being children of God and connected with God from the very beginning of our existence underlies our Church's teaching about the sanctity of human life from its beginnings. For if each human life is sacred and created by God, for any human to interfere with the creation of that human life, or to destroy that human life as it is created, frustrates the will of God who cares for and loves each of us from our very beginnings.

We as American Catholics have seen the results of the devaluation of human life by our society. The scourge of legalized abortion in our country over the past 32 years – has caused many in our society to become callous to the persistent attack on human life before the birth stage. Public officials – news commentators – and others in society often hold up for ridicule those who support and defend the right to life for the unborn in their mother's womb. They call those of us who oppose these attacks on human life "religious zealots" or "extremists", as if those who oppose destruction of human life are those who are erroneous.

Now here in Missouri, we are seeing much of that disregard for the sanctity of early human life coming to rest. We read in our newspapers and hear on the television about a proposal to amend our state constitution to allow stem cell research that will supposedly cure many dreaded diseases.

It is important to recognize that the Catholic Church supports stem cell research that is ethical and affirms human life. The Church supports adult stem cell research that has led to the successful treatment of 65 diseases, including treatment for leukemia, lymphoma, heart damage, spinal cord and stroke damage, sickle cell anemia, and tissue and bone regeneration.

But the proposal that Missouri voters will face at the ballot box next year would allow, and authorize the use, of public funds to conduct embryonic stem cell research. Embryonic stem cell research destroys human life at the earliest stage – the human embryo. The research involves creating human life – a human embryo – and then taking that human embryo apart to extract

stem cells. This kind of stem cell research does not respect human life. It seeks to put the scientist in the place of God – as the potter – who can create and then break apart the clay of human life.

The proposal also allows the destruction of human embryos created through means of artificial conception on behalf of married couples to allow them to have children, in the name of scientific research and medical therapies. This proposal also would allow the creation of human embryos through the same process as scientists used to create Dolly the Sheep – a process known as “somatic cell nuclear transfer” or “SCNT”. However, unlike the scientists that created Dolly the Sheep, Missouri’s proposed constitutional amendment provides that the embryos thus created would be destroyed for their “stem cells” – a scientific term that refers to human tissue in the early stages of development before that tissue differentiates into human skin, bones and blood.

The proposal removes all ethical restrictions in state law that limit taxpayer funds from being used to subsidize this research, so that moneys collected from us as taxpayers will be used for these immoral purposes. Although the proposal does not itself raise taxes or create new sources of state funds for such research, it does allow researchers to tap into current state funds available to pay for research, without regard for the morality of their research practices.

This proposal takes the attacks on early human life to even a higher level than before. The proposed constitutional amendment shows disrespect toward human life at the very point of its creation by God our Father. Human cloning as proposed by the amendment completely divorces human reproduction from the context of a loving union between man and woman, producing children with no “parents” in the ordinary sense. In cloning, human life does not arise from an act of love, but is manufactured to predetermined specifications. Cloning dehumanizes human procreation and treats human beings as laboratory products – as nothing more than carriers of traits that others find useful. Cloning human embryos for research demeans life by creating new human lives simply in order to destroy them.

Those who would support such a proposal clearly – in the words of Isaiah the prophet – have wandered far from God’s ways, and have allowed their hearts to become hardened so that they no longer fear God. As Catholic Christians living in Missouri, we are called upon by our faith to use all means we have at our disposal to stop this attack on human life. We will be called upon by our faith to say ‘No’ when we are approached in the coming months by those who will want us to sign petitions to place this measure on our state ballot next fall. We will be called upon again by our faith to make sure we go to the polls, to exercise our rights as citizens living in a democracy, so that we stand up and are counted in opposition to this amendment. We will be called by our faith to vote “no” against this proposal when it appears on the ballot next fall, ensuring that, to the best of our ability, our state laws and policies reflect the value of human life as a gift from God to each one of us.

On this First Sunday of Advent – the first day of our liturgical year in the Church – we recognize as Catholic Christians that we will be called upon to stand up and practice the values we share as Catholic citizens of Missouri and oppose this unprecedented and unwarranted attack on human life in our state throughout this next year in our Church. We are blessed that we live in a democracy in which our government reflects the values we hold as citizens. It is important that we as the Church speak out on the moral dimensions of public life and the issues we confront as Catholic citizens in our state and country. As Catholics, we are called to put into play in our lives the Gospel values taught to us by Jesus Christ to love and care for all people at all

stages of their lives – from their very beginnings to their death to life on this earth. We are called to live out the moral truths we share as Catholic citizens – not just here in our church communities – not just at home in our families – but in society and our public lives. On this “New Year’s Day” in the life of our Church, we must recognize that we will be called in a special and certain way to uphold those moral truths throughout this year in opposing this proposed constitutional amendment in our state.

Our actions during this next year will provide – again in the words of the Prophet Isaiah – the opportunity that God might find us doing right and being mindful of God in our ways. Our hope and our prayer this day is that – by our words and actions as faithful Catholics – we can shape the policy of our state over this next year so that our state laws and policies respect human life at its very beginnings.