

Fr. Nelson currently serves at [The Church of Saint John the Evangelist, Stockton, CA](#)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

I wish to begin this clergy talk by saying that this talk is dedicated to the life and witness of Pope John Paul II.

I apologize to my brother priests, as this may seem like a cliché after recent addresses we have heard, but it is only appropriate to dedicate a talk on human life to the great theologian of human life, a man who will very likely be remembered as the Doctor of Life.

As a side note, this short talk is based on the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, or “the Gospel of Life.”

Now, I wish to speak to the youth gathered here tonight. I wish to speak as one of you, as it is becoming increasingly clear to me that you and I - only being and most 15 years apart in age - are of the same generation, a generation which has been orphaned by indifference to human life, not only our own lives, but the lives of the countless souls who would have been our best friends, our companions, our husbands, our wives.

We have been orphaned by indifference, by a generation of fathers and mothers who have tended to see human life as little more than a biological process, the intricate system of cells and bodily systems.

This reflects what we in the Church would call “materialism” - the belief that the only things that are real are material things, the things that we can touch, taste, and see. All other reality, being unable to be sensed, falls into the category of being either “unknowable” (the category for agnostics) or “fanciful” (the category of atheists).

Yet, the Church, believing in both things seen and unseen holds a much higher vision, not only of the created order, but of humanity itself.

John Paul II said about this:

“Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase.”

You and I are called to something greater than what cereal we ate for breakfast this morning, something greater than the car we rode to get here, something greater than the house we live in and the beds in which we sleep - this is John Paul II’s message.

We are created for an eternal vocation - that of worshipping God forever and now. Because of this, each and every life is sacred.

You and I are called to share the very Life of God. This is a sharing which death makes impossible. Adam and Eve in the garden were meant to live forever - to have eternal life with God, even in a very limited sense. By their sin, they brought about the necessary consequence - death. And, after many hundreds of years, they finally succumb to death.

We need to begin by saying that death is not something which God *chooses*. God made us for incorruptibility. We are the ones who choose death - and the truth of things is that we don't have to. We are created to have life, and more importantly to "have it abundantly."

The roots of this essential problem are seen in the story from the Book of Genesis of the first two brothers, Cain and Abel. You remember the story - Cain and Abel offer gifts before the Lord and God has favor on Abel's gift. Out of a burning jealousy, Cain suggests that he and Abel take a walk in the field, and there in the field, Cain strangles his brother to death.

You know the story:

God says to Cain: "Where is your brother Abel?"

Cain says "Am I my brother's keeper?"

We often forget the the next part: God says to Cain "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

This account of the very first murder reveals a theological truth: that God seeks justice when life He holds in His hands is taken.

Secondly, there is a violation of the family bonds of the human race. Each of us has a personal and great dignity. We are made in the likeness and image of God. To murder is to violate that dignity, to violate the spiritual kinship which we all share.

This is the reason that Cain is cursed by God and also by the earth - because he has violated life - his environment will naturally be changed - from one of fertility and peace to one of scarcity, loneliness, and separation from God.

Yet, even for Cain, there is good news. God puts a mark on him, so that no one could come upon him and kill him.

What is important for us to remember tonight is that the blood of those whose lives are cut short by violence within the human family continually cries up from the ground for justice.

This violence take many forms, from murder to neglect, to global hunger, to laws which protect doctors who choose, in their own minds to cut lives short - a violation of their sacred oath.

It is here that I remind you of the battle lines which have been drawn in this battle. They are the battle lines which we seek to continually remind you of in the Saint Michael's conference. On the one side is an angel whose shield bears the inscription: *Quis ut Deus* - WHO IS LIKE GOD? On the other side is an angel, at once ugly and beautiful who holds a banner inscribed: "YOU CAN BE LIKE GOD!"

In every moment of life, we are posed with a question between these two - Michael the Archangel and Lucifer the Demon. Our response can only to line up on one side of the line or the other. To say with Michael - who is like God? Or to say with Satan - "I can be like God."

Stirring on the other side in this battle, the army which says boldly “I can be like God!” is a new weapon. I believe that this weapon is very much their “doomsday machine.” It is their last-ditch effort at subverting Christians who would save the world. This weapon is called “The Culture of Death.”

The culture of death disguises itself as merciful and kind. It disguises itself as giving honor to women and the elderly. It promises to save us from death by a unique means - giving **death to us** in small, sustainable doses.

This is a culture which is literally massive, composed of millions upon millions people either wittingly or unwittingly bent on the destruction of God’s most basic gift - the gift of life.

They say to the disabled - you are suffering too much. Take this pill, and you will have relief of your suffering in death. They take away one of the only remaining dignities that we have as human beings - the dignity of sanctifying suffering and a holy death. They say we don’t have any use for suffering - give us death!

They say to the elderly - you are in the twilight of life, and no one should have to live like you do, with bedsores and dementia, and diapers. After all, you are a drain on our economy - keeping you alive is expensive, and you no longer contribute. Take this pill, and it will all be over.

They say to couples who cannot have children of their own, conceive your children in a dish in a lab. We’ll implant some of the embryos, and we’ll kill the rest, maybe we’ll do research on them. You’ll have your baby - the ends justify the means. We have solved the problems of life with death.

The Culture of Death finally says to women with newly conceived life within them - you are not ready for motherhood. You are too poor, and uneducated, and your baby will suffer. Go to this doctor, he will solve your problem of life with death.

We take away the greatest gift which a woman can have - that of being a mother - with a vacuum and a scalpel. We call it justice. We call it a “right.” We make it legal. Some have even said that in modern culture - abortion is now a sacrament!

This is a war of the powerful against the weak. It is a war of the middle-aged against the young and the old. The weak are left weaker, the powerful more powerful.

Lives which require more love, acceptance and care are considered useless, or an intolerable burden. And the Culture of Death’s solution to this is **more Death!**

These threats to life are not created by nature - by jealousy like Cain’s or the burning vengeance of most murderers. They are scientifically and systematically produced. In Nazi Germany, Hitler made medical doctors his number one henchmen in the Holocaust. For the Nazis, genocide was a scientific program. For us, it is no different. The Culture of Death enlists medicine as its chief ally.

Now, rights which our forefathers fought and died for, chiefly the right to life, are now being contested at the most important moments in life - in conception, in birth, and in death. We, in this country, believe ourselves to be free - free morally, physically, and spiritually. But, are we *really*? What happens when a culture turns from life to death?

I will tell you.

It becomes Godless.

It becomes a culture without God. A culture without beauty - a culture without goodness. It becomes a culture which believes that the only things which are real are the things which I can touch, taste, smell and feel, where material realities are the only realities.

It is a culture which screams "I can be like God!" and yet - God does not exist. This is a culture which reflects only one actual reality - the reality of hell - the reality of eternal loneliness.

The only way to avert this disaster is to stand up and say with Saint Michael "WHO IS LIKE GOD?" To stand up and say that there is something horribly macabre and ugly about all of this.

At this point, I want to tell you how much God loves life, even when we are indifferent.

How do we know that God loves life?

We know it because when we were busy spilling each other's blood on the ground, God spilled His most precious blood on the ground for us - for human life, that our lives may have their endless and eternal life combined with His unending life.

Jesus Christ, Very God of Very God, poured out his life - he emptied himself to the point of death, for you and for me.

You see, God's solution for death was not death, it was life. We see this in the fact that Jesus did not stay in His tomb. Death could not hold Him! He rises from the dead, never to die again.

Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: "we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."

Yes, Our God LOVES LIFE!

Every single human life is valuable to God and because it is valuable to God - it should be valuable to us.

The next question before us is that of how we, as a people and a generation, battling on the side of he who says "Who is like God?" may live our lives to God, as the God the Son lives His life.

I want to begin by exposing the realities that we face.

The first is the reality of capital punishment. I will begin by saying rather clearly that the Church has consistently upheld the use of the death penalty for the sake of pure justice. In the case of nations in which capital punishment is the last resort, it is permissible. But, in civilizations in which it is unnecessary (where we have prisons to hold these offenders), it can only be vengeful - it can only be used for the denigration of sacred human life, not for its protection. We must remember that God's response to murder is to protect the murderer from being murdered himself.

We cannot be a culture of violence against life as a solution to violence against life. Life is the answer! If the inner life of God - the Life of the Trinity - is that of self-gift, of self-donation for the life of others, we must be molded by this.

The second reality is that of euthanasia. In many countries in Europe, it is now permissible, indeed laudable to end one's life early for the sake of a "good" death. Basically, this is simply telling the elderly and the dying that for them, their lives are over - that there is no dignity in suffering. This practice is slowly gaining acceptance in the American medical community. We cannot allow it.

The third concerns embryonic stem cell research. This is the practice of taking human embryos and destroying them for the basic cellular matter which doctors believe might hold the cure for many diseases, including Parkinson's and many cancers. The teaching of the church is that the ends do not justify the means. Good ends cannot be achieved by immoral or impious methods. Destroying human life for the purpose of research is abhorrent to the Gospel of Life.

But, I don't want to say anything else about these issues.

I want to address the problem that mainly affects you.

As you came in, each of you were given a number. These numbers are between one and five.

I'd like all of you to stand up.

Now, if you have a five in your hand, sit down.

Look around! Those of you who are seated have been killed in the womb by abortion. This is the affliction of our generation - that one in five of our generation was killed in the womb by abortion.

In this country, the difference between abortion and murder is merely a difference of location.

If I reach my hand into the womb and strangle a baby, it is allowable in every one of the 50 states, but if I make an incision and pull the baby out and then strangle it - it is murder and I will be tried and thrown in prison.

Here in Fort Worth on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays a doctor drives to a Planned Parenthood where 15-20 women ranging in age from 12 years old to middle age are waiting for him. These women are mothers, and they have come to have their babies killed. They cross the battle line between Michael's Army - a group of Christians gathered to pray for them - and into the territory of the enemy.

They file into rooms, and the doctor goes from room to room. He enters the room. He kills, dismantling very quickly the life inside his patient, being sure to get each tiny part out so as not to cause an infection, and then he leaves.

Each woman is asked to pay her \$300 fee - the cost of her baby's life. The doctor leaves each day \$2000 to almost \$4000 dollars. He has murdered for money.

[Pass out the babies.]

This is what a baby looks like 12 weeks after conception. She has hands and feet. She has a heartbeat, which can be heard with special equipment. She can grab things that are put in her hand. She can swallow.

She is just two weeks younger than the baby inside my wife's womb, a baby who can now suck his or her thumb - a baby which we love already, whom we cannot wait to meet.

The women who lined up at the Planned Parenthood clinic this very morning and their babies are women and babies whom God loves! The good news in all of this is that the Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life for their lives out of His vast love.

The forgiveness of God is vast - vast enough even to cover the sin of abortion.

I want to tell you about two friends of mine. One is a beautiful girl, just a year younger than me. The other is a priest. I will call them Emily and David.

Emily was conceived when her mother was raped at a party just north of Chicago in 1979. Her mother was young - the same age as many of you. She chose life. Her daughter was placed in an adoptive family shortly after her birth. She is now married and is a teacher at a local school.

David was conceived by his mother and father, two teenagers in love. His mother chose life. He was placed in an adoptive family, and a few years ago was ordained to the priesthood.

Emily and David could have been statistics - part of the %20 of their generation wiped out by abortion. But, they are not.

They are not part of the 1.3 million babies killed each year in this country by abortion. They are not part of the more than forty million who have been killed since abortion became legal in this country.

What can you do?

If you're not already doing so - pray every single day for an end to abortion. God will hear the prayers of his faithful people.

Second - do not be silent. Do not stand by and be silent when this subject is brought up among your friends and family. Indifference and apathy are fed by silence. Be silent no more.

Carry this little baby around with you - perhaps in your backpack. When you see it, allow it to remind you of the baby which is killed every 14 seconds in his mother's womb and challenge you to pray for this soul.

When you come into contact with a friend who has become pregnant, show her this baby. You tell her that Father Nelson and his wife have a place in their home for this baby. Tell her that if she cannot care for and love this baby, then I will.

In fact, I have numerous families at my parish that would welcome her baby into their families. My friends Angela and Garret Kelley cannot have any more children. Their home is warm and loving - *they* will welcome her baby.

Lastly, you must be holy.

All life is holy to God, and yours especially.

The number one way that we can witness to the Gospel of Life is to be holy. Make your confession. Commit yourself to life-long chastity. Do not buy into the lie that you are simply a biological life-form. You are a child of God! You are sons and daughters of the Most High, and you are sacred to Him! Do not ever forget it. You are destined for glory! You are destined for life!

On this Eve of the Presentation, we remember Our Mother Mary. We remember how she gave thanks for the gift of the life of her Son, for the gift of a safe delivery. On this festival, the Church gives thanks to God for all life.

Let us pray:

“O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women
who are victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided mercy.

Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.

Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.”

Amen.