

Monday was the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Since my ordination I am always moved by the collect of the day. If I may pray:

O Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts and commandedst him earnestly to feed thy flock; Make we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This was a big week for religious observations – despite the irreligious news that has been breathtaking in an unpleasant sense.

First, we remembered two of the great Apostles, and then at the end of the week we remembered the Visitation of the Theotokos, Mary, with Elizabeth. More of that later. Today, in the Gospel we read of another miracle at our Lord's hands.

When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and walked (Mark 5:38-42)

For once we hear an account of a ruler of the synagogue that is not disparaging. He had such faith in Jesus that he stuck with hope for his child despite the crowd laughing at Jesus. Is Mark suggesting that the crowd was taking Jesus as a fool? Jesus is demonstrating once again the love God has for all of us – children included.

Which leads me to the Visitation that we observed on July 2nd. What is this Visitation? While Mary was pregnant, she went to visit her elderly cousin, who also was with child. You may remember that these would not have been considered convenient pregnancies. Elizabeth was surprised that she could be pregnant at her age, but she was with the child named John, and destined to be the Baptist. We all know about Mary's situation. Listen to words from Luke's Gospel account of the meeting of the ladies.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women.... For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.”

We have two pregnant women, and by the obvious work of the Holy Spirit, we are confronted with evidence of the unborn children responding to their surroundings. I know that for at least forty years of sensitivity to pregnancies, I have observed parents speaking to their unborn children, playing music for them, and certainly mothers adjusting their diets for unborn children. The Psalmist makes reference to God knowing him before birth. In the Judeo-Christian world, it is only in our arrogant, post-war societies that religious institutions have tolerated the wholesale destruction of the lives of infants. To their shame, some have approved it by resolutions.

Curiously, at about the time we celebrate the Visitation, the State of Minnesota publishes the number of induced abortions of the previous calendar year. So, not long after I read the words of the Gospel of the day, I saw that for the first time in several years, the number of induced abortions in MN increased by 2%. Now, 2% does not seem like much in terms of a price increase, but 2% of the babies killed in 2013 is an extra 220 lives sacrificed! The State of MN has tallied 10,123 induced abortions in 2014.

Some sympathizers are inclined to point to the so-called hard cases. Well, that amounts to 413. Yes, among the 10,123 lives that were ended, the vast majority, 9,710, were for economic reasons or the mother did not want another child at the time. Even if we discount the so-called 413 hard cases, induced abortion is the number 1 cause of death in this state. The published numbers from the state put cancer as the #1 cause, but the last year tallied put cancer 2nd with 9,603 deaths – and those were most certainly not intentional for reasons of convenience.

When you read the numbers that will probably be in the news this week, think about the fact that the total breaks down to 27 babies' lives taken each day of the year and 26 of those are for convenience. At the same time, we have about one traffic fatality per day in the state. Can you imagine the furor that would ensue if we had 10 traffic fatalities each day – not to mention 26? But in the case of innocent babies, the public quietly acquiesces to the notion that women should have free choice. (They ignore the fact that many of the lives they choose to end are girls being denied the opportunity to become women.)

Tertullian in “The Apology,” says *“to forbid birth is only quicker murder. It makes no difference whether one takes away the life once born or to destroy it as it comes to birth.”* If you turn that around as the proponents of abortion have done, it could be acceptable to terminate the life of any child.

Now and then we perceive what appears to be a descent into greater depths of depravity and ignoring God’s word. The recent decision of the Supreme Court leaves many of us stunned, and what had been a mainline church has endorsed the decision and changed their church language to accommodate perversions in a welcoming atmosphere. All that pales in light of the 1973 Supreme Court decision and the church endorsements of infanticide that have been repeated in the years since. From the beginnings of the Church Catholic, we have been marked as people who don’t kill – not even children. That continues as a fundamental precept of this branch.

We are properly appalled at the loss of life in natural disasters and terrorist attacks. I suggest we should be no less horrified by the number of infants killed each year – many more in one year in this state alone than all the terrorist attacks in this country in the last 20 years. We also recognize the other victims of this carnage, and we extend our hand and compassion to those women who have difficult pregnancies and those who have suffered terminations of them.

Thanks be to God that the inconvenient pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary went to full term. May God grant us the wisdom and fortitude to bear witness to his love for children – even before they are born.