

Rev. Derek Fairman

Pro-Life Talk

[Introductions]

[Reading of John 4:4-30]

[Bibliography]: Do not be offended by my using military examples in the talk. I am not advocating violence at all. Rather, quite the contrary. If the pro-life movement wants to win, any time a person wants to win, winning means learning from people who know how to win. Examples from military history are meant to be generic, and they are examples of someone knowing how to win. Besides, our Lord Himself used a hypothetical military example to explain the demands of discipleship:

Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, every one of you who does not renounce his possessions cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:31-33).

I should mention that I do have a Bachelor of Science degree in Life Science from Penn State University, like a degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. In part because of that background, I have not considered certain arguments by the pro-choice side as being serious, such as the idea that the unborn are somehow not human. Whenever men and women procreate, they do not produce other species of animals. Granted, a human being at early stages may develop characteristics usually associated with other animals, like a tail. But the fetus is human. At conception, the necessary genome for a human, meaning 46 chromosomes, is present.

The question of when a new life begins is crystal clear: at conception. Of course, the unborn, from the moment of conception, are alive: they are growing, and only life grows; inanimate objects and dead things do not grow. Whenever Our Lady visited St. Bernadette, she declared that she is the Immaculate Conception. She was conceived without sin. That was the first moment of her existence.

Although these issues are crystal clear to me, and sonogram technology has affirmed this, I also realize that not everyone has the background that I do, and some people might not understand. I realize that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of educating people about the origin of new life.

The rights of unborn is a serious conversation. However, considering that the unborn are already alive, the question is not whether a human being has the right to receive life, as if the parents or government or anyone else can bestow life on something

that is not already alive. The unborn already have life, so the question is whether the life that they have can justly be taken away from them.

Some argue that the issue should be up to the states to decide. While I agree that the people's will should be behind any laws, this issue should not be up to the states to decide. While I do not disagree that certain laws should be left up to states, such as whether beer and wine can be sold in grocery stores, there are questions about whether the unborn should be allowed to keep their lives, and children in New York were not conceived differently than ones in Kentucky. The unjust taking of a life cannot be allowed in some states but not others. The questions of life and death are a little more consequential than where beer or wine can be sold.

Whenever I was at seminary in Columbus, every Saturday or nearly every Saturday, we seminarians went to pray at a nearby abortion clinic. Not all seminarians went, which was fine: those who did go never judged those who did not. We simply went and prayed the Rosary while sidewalk counsellors tried to talk the women coming over to the clinic not to go in. Yes, thankfully, there were women who turned around and did not enter.

That went on for several years until, one day, a group from another church showed up. They wanted to fight with the owners of the clinic. I know because a few weeks later that is what I watched them do. The first time, though, they could not find any owners to fight, so they turned their attention on us. They laughed and laughed, saying that we were praying to a dead woman and chanting, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." It was a surreal experience, being heckled by other pro-lifers. We seminarians talked about the experience for weeks. I heard that these others did not harass the sidewalk counselors, but made their job so difficult that the counselors were in tears, and not sure what to do.

After the second incident, I decided that I had seen enough, and found another clinic to pray at by myself. At first, I could not understand why no one else was there, and why there were no cars in the parking lot. The next week I went again, by myself, but there was someone else there who explained that the clinic was not open every week. We got along quite well. A few weeks before I finally graduated from seminary, I heard that the clinic had moved out of the area. I wish it had closed, but it did not, it just moved.

I tried to talk my fellow seminarians into coming with me, but they insisted on going to the same clinic where they had always gone. Since the other church group was still showing up, I warned some of them that there could be trouble. "No, that's where we always go," they said. Well, during my final year in the seminary, there was trouble and the seminarians were not allowed to go any more. I did not want to say to them, "I told you so," so I did not say anything. But I did tell them.

My views on the March for Life have always been mixed. My first experience was taking a bus as a college student, and the experience was a good one. It was very to the

point: take the bus down to Washington, attend the March, get meals in route, and get home by the end of the day.

The second experience was my one and only experience as a seminarian. We left the day before the March, and got in Washington around dinner. Those who planned the trip knew people in Washington, and wanted to meet their friends for dinner. That left the rest of us to fend for ourselves in the Murder Capital of the United States. Three of us found a nearby Chinese restaurant with bars in the windows and when we went inside, they had bulletproofed glass that you had to speak through to order, and a little slot on the bottom of the glass to pay.

Then, after dinner, we finally made it to the National Shrine Basilica for the Vigil Mass. However, after the Mass, we did not go anywhere, since there was Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament all through the night in the crypt, and our seminary had the 1:00 AM to 2:00 AM shift. So, after the Mass I went down into the crypt area into the Immaculate Conception chapel, found a pew and tried to get some sleep, mostly to no avail. Then, whenever it was 1:00 AM, I joined the other seminarians for Adoration, which was fine. After our shift was over, then we had to walk back to the Josephite House. We were strictly warned not to go alone, but only in a large group. This was because of the neighborhood through which we had to walk. I was part of a small group that got separated because of a few guys who had trouble walking.

So, then we got to the Josephite House and had to get up early, because there was a Mass in the morning for the seminarians. After doing all that, we had to figure out how to eat and then eventually get to the March itself. During the rally, there was a young boy who got separated from his mom and we had to help him find his mom. Then we marched and went home. I would describe this experience as barely-under-control chaos.

I have heard that whoever does not attend the March for Life is not serious about being pro-life. I recognize that there are people who do not like abortion but are not bothered by it, or who do not like it but do not care enough to do anything about it, and no they will likely not attend the March for Life. However, just because people who do not care much do not go to the March for Life, it does not follow that people who do not go to the March for Life do not care about the issue. It is important to not make that logical mistake. It is possible to care a lot about the issue but not go to the March for Life for a good reason. More on that later.

Even though my time at seminary was the last March for Life I attended, that was not my last experience with the March for Life. Another experience came whenever I preached at a Mass a while ago for those going to the March. I mentioned that it might be better to end abortion through legislative means rather than just political maneuvering on the Supreme Court, because if there is political maneuvering without the support of the people, what is to stop the other side from further manipulation? It was a view that I

had heard some of my seminary professors make, so it was not as if I had pulled the idea out of thin air. Anyway, after Mass, as I was cleaning up things in the sacristy, one man came in and gave me an earful about how I was wrong for about 5 to 10 minutes. I guess I had struck a nerve.

Then there was the blizzard of 2016. All through that weekend we were helping stranded Catholics figure out how they would celebrate Mass, since they had planned on celebrating Sunday Mass when they got back home. The parish helped a priest from Minnesota who was celebrating Mass at a hotel in Breezewood. We had a group from Chicago come through with three busloads of teenagers, and we helped them celebrate Sunday Mass here. It was a surreal experience, and enjoyable to help people in need.

Between 2016 and June of 2022, there have been several questions that have entered my mind. The rally is a good thing, and should continue. It is a way for pro-life leaders to remind everyone of why this is still important, and to encourage everyone, and to galvanize support to continue to help those in need. The March itself though is another. A protest is meant to get people's attention, to send a message, to disrupt normal activities. The thing is, most networks do not broadcast live from it, or even report that it happened. If the pro-life movement is going to have a national protest, you need television to cover the event, right? What if the only television networks to report on it are watched by other pro-lifers? What if the lawmakers have come to ignore it? What if the people you are trying to reach are not getting the message, or just ignoring it?

Now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned, this issue is more pressing. Is it simply a tradition that we perform out of habit? I realize that these are questions that do not have easy answers. I recognize that there is another side to these questions than my own: the March still sends a powerful message, there are still national issues like the Hyde Amendment that need resolved, and so on. I would not pretend to have all the answers. However, these questions are worth asking, and if I am asking them, you can be sure others are as well. We should not be afraid to ask these questions, for if we are somehow afraid to ask pertinent questions, we cannot win.

THE PRO-LIFE CAUSE VERSUS THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT

At this point, I want to make a distinction between what I call the pro-life cause and the pro-life movement. The pro-life cause is the total efforts to save children from abortion: prayer, crisis pregnancy centers, monuments to the unborn, and so on. It is a wide range of efforts to save children who are at risk. The pro-life movement is the political wing of the cause. It is the sum of the efforts to end legal protection of abortion, whether legislatively or judicially.

While I am supportive of the pro-life cause in its entirety, the pro-life movement is something in which I have found disappointment. It is like the Union Army before Ulysses S. Grant took it over. The Union was on the right moral side of history, had superior numbers and money, was more industrialized, and yet early in the Civil War the Confederacy was winning far more often.

IS THE PRO-LIFE SIDE WINNING?

What about winning? I know that there have been a lot of statements made publicly that “Life is Winning.” Well, there have been significant wins for the pro-life movement, and we want to stay positive, but it is still possible in some states for a child to be aborted up until the moment of birth, a barbarity tolerated only in China and North Korea. If that is what it is like to win, I hate to see what losing looks like. Some may think that the slogan “Life is Winning” is a harmless exaggeration, but I see it as taking away any impetus to change strategy. If we are winning, we should keep doing what is working. If we are not doing well, then we might have to rethink things.

I realize that the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was a tremendous victory, and yes, marching and praying and speaking out all had a part to play. For the most part, it was the result of various bright legal minds figuring out how to bring the perfect case to make the overturn happen. However, while the pro-life movement is celebrating, are things any better for the unborn, who, you know, we are supposedly fighting for? While the pro-life movement is celebrating, the pro-choice movement is plotting their next moves, and I fear that the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* might become hollow. If the abortion industry finds ways of circumventing anti-abortion laws, then what does it matter if the laws are changed?

It is not as if the pro-choice movement did not see the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* coming. Several intelligent supporters of *Roe v. Wade* saw the flaws in its argument, and predicted that eventually it would be overturned. They might have thought that it would happen a lot later than it did, but they knew it was coming, and all the time they have been thinking of ways of getting around the laws, especially in regards to chemical abortions. While surgical abortions have a few requirements, such as a confirmation that there is a child, and a mother making a physical appearance at the clinic, chemical abortions do not have these requirements.

Besides chemical abortions, there are other dangers to the unborn. There are contraceptive pills which have blurred the lines between contraception and abortion, so that a woman can prevent conception or abort the already conceived child, and these pills work so that it does not matter if the woman knows whether she is pregnant or not. There are abortifacients which do not destroy the unborn child, but prevent the embryo

from planting on the uterine wall, and so the unborn embryo simply dies outside of the womb.

Now, there are laws in some states which are supposed to prevent the sale of chemical abortion pills. But if these pills can be sold without an appointment, what is there to stop these pills from getting to women in states that have outlawed them? We might think that these pills will be controlled. Well, there are controlled substances in this country. Look at how well opioids are under control. If women really want to get these pills, they will find a way, and pro-choice activists will find a way to get them to the women who want them.

If there is one state that allows these pills to be distributed, then they might as well be available in all 50 states, or at least most. If that is the case, then the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* would be hollow, only a symbolic victory that not only does not help the unborn, but even hurts them. Since the pro-choice movement is now more energized because of this symbolic victory, this makes the lives of the unborn even more tenuous than they were before. It is like cutting off a head of the hydra, and finding out that several more heads have grown in its place.

Ultimately, yes, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was a victory, and while it saved children in some states, because of the subsequent backlash in society, it also put children's lives at risk in other states. This is not exactly the kind of victory the pro-life movement was looking for.

What is the plan now? You might remember Cassandra from Homer's *Iliad*: she was the Princess of Troy who could accurately predict the future, but no one ever listened to her. There are many Cassandras in the pro-life movement, who have foreseen problems with the directions in which the pro-life movement have taken.

GOALS VERSUS STRATEGIES

If we want to achieve victory, we must avoid reacting emotionally, either to people who are pro-choice or even our fellow pro-lifers. Our abhorrence at the taking of an innocent life should be distinguished from how we approach people who are pro-choice. There are other important distinctions to make. There is a difference between perseverance in achieving a goal, versus perseverance in pursuing a certain strategy. It is not enough to possess virtue and to have principle, as important as those are. We must also have the wisdom to apply them properly. A person who finds suddenly that he is about to drive off a cliff is wise to stop and turn around before he heads off the cliff. There are those who might accuse him of being fickle and changing his mind too easily, and not staying the course, but stopping the car is a wise decision.

Virtue and principle are applicable to the *goals* that we have. Whenever it comes to the *concrete strategies* that we apply to achieve our goals, besides having virtue and principle, we also must be pragmatic and adaptable. That is not to endorse violence or other illicit actions to achieve goals. Yet the point is there is a difference between the question, “Why do you want to win?” or “What do you hope to accomplish by winning?” versus the question, “How do you expect to achieve victory?”

Take President Abraham Lincoln. No one would accuse him of not being dedicated to preserving the Union or not believing in the equality of all human beings. No one would argue that he was not an avid abolitionist. However, his perseverance pertained to the goal. He was also a pragmatist who dismissed generals who did not achieve victory. He had to be adaptable to the situations in which he found himself. He believed in the cause of the preservation of the Union, which motivated him to want to win, which means that he used the best strategies possible to do that. He was committed to what he believed, but he did not commit to a particular strategy. Perseverance is important to achieving a goal. But perseverance is not a virtue if it results in continuing to pursue a losing strategy that achieves nothing.

Take General Washington in the cause for independence. No one would argue that he was not committed to independence. Yet his zeal for independence did not mean that he tried to win all at once. He knew that the war would take time, and be drawn out. He did not win every battle. He knew that lives would be lost. Yet it would be silly to suggest that the deaths that ensued or the battles that were lost could be attributed to his lack of enthusiasm for the cause of independence, as if to suggest that if he were really a believer in the cause of independence, he would have won everything in a single battle. That is very facile thinking. It was his dedication to the cause of independence and his desire to win that helped him endure the cold winter of Valley Forge, and eventually achieve victory. Given the conditions that existed at the beginning of the war, an attempt to win in one swift stroke would have caused certain defeat. A good general knows that winning is about taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

REASONS TO JOIN THE FIGHT VERSUS STRATEGIES OF WINNING

There is another important distinction to make, between the reason why someone may join a fight, which can often be very emotive, versus wanting to win the fight, which can often be rational. Individual soldiers are willing to make sacrifices, to give the full measure of devotion. But that does not mean that they do not value their own lives. There is a difference between being afraid to make a sacrifice, versus being concerned that one's sacrifice would not make any difference. Freedom and love can be reasons why a person might fight, and that can be the reason for a person to join the armed forces.

However, that is a different question than what is happening in a particular situation. A patriot in the Continental Army may have joined the regular army because he believed in freedom. Yet the same patriot might have also asked how his potential death in a particular battle would have a real impact upon the war, that is, how would winning this battle, even at the cost of one's own life, achieve the goal of independence? Like those in command, the soldier wants to win, and the soldier must have confidence that winning the field is at least a possible, but preferably a likely or probable outcome. Who wants to commit to a strategy that has little to no chance of success?

Freedom for our founders was not simply an ideal, a vague idea that has nothing to do with the real world. Freedom for our founders was very real: they identified the lack of freedom in their own situation. Freedom meant forming a political body that was distinct from the one that they experienced. This involved making sacrifices, but also ensuring that those sacrifices translated into real results.

So, yes, we are willing to make sacrifices for the unborn, but we want to make sure that our sacrifices are really going to help them. We want to make those small sacrifices to have a maximum impact, and that means employing strategies that are best suited to do that. We do have a lot of energy and zeal, but we also want to make sure that our energies are being channeled into victory.

There is no doubt that people in the pro-life cause are willing to sacrifice and pray and do many other things for the sake of the unborn. But the willingness to sacrifice is not the issue; the issue is whether such sacrifices are having an effect, are really helping to save the unborn. There are two questions that we must ask in order to develop an effective strategy, "Why do we fight?" and "What does victory look like?"

These two questions directly impact the path to victory for the unborn. No matter how great our energies, and how brilliant we think the designs, ultimately the approach and the attitude we have are just as important. Sun Tzu once explained that for the great general, the battle has already played out in the mind and the heart first. Victory in the mind leads to victory in the real world. St. Joan of Arc once explained, "All battles are first won or lost, in the mind."

WHY DO WE FIGHT?

Some might ask, "Why do we fight?" This is to not just ask the question about what we believe, but also why we believe it. For me, the answer is straightforward: that unborn child in the womb is me, and it is you, and it is all of us. Perhaps you have heard something about education, that whenever one school fails a child, we are all brought down because of it. The same is true of the womb: whenever one life is deliberately taken

in the womb, it is an offense against all of us. It is about empathy, and having empathy for the one in the womb who cannot fight for himself or herself.

The children in the womb are the most vulnerable members of society. That does not mean that other members of society do not have real vulnerabilities, whether those vulnerabilities are financial or emotional or due to something else. However, there is nothing that an unborn child can do about the circumstances in which the child finds himself or herself. That should mean that we have boundless empathy and compassion for someone who has no voice, no way of making a difference. However, not all have that compassion, and that is what we must change.

Whenever it comes to empathy, sometimes pro-lifers are accused of not having any empathy for the women who find themselves in difficult situations. That is not true, we must have empathy for women who find themselves in situations which are not only difficult, but they also seem to face those situations alone. Yet there is a difference between not possessing any empathy, versus possessing empathy, but not to the point at which we are going to allow a person to take another's life.

Ultimately, as much as we might empathize with those mothers in difficult circumstances, this empathy cannot allow a life to be lost in the womb. The situation of a child in the womb is more precarious, and that must be why we are committed to protecting the unborn in the womb. That is why we fight to protect the unborn and the vulnerable in society.

Here we must acknowledge the possible and likely presence of ulterior motives within the pro-life movement. This might be compared to a train. At a train station, an engine pulls into the station, and there are a whole bunch of cars waiting to be hitched to the engine. Sometimes ideas are like that: someone might have a great idea, which is like an engine with a lot of force to it. Then what happens is that a whole bunch of other ideas, some of which have been tried and failed but someone is determined to make them happen, get attached to the great idea. The initial idea gets weighed down by a bunch of extraneous ideas, much like a group of cars would weigh down an engine.

The pro-life movement must focus on the issue at hand in order to have any hope of achieving victory. This movement cannot get sidetracked with ulterior motives, which inject false ideas of victory into the movement and take the movement in different directions. All in the pro-life movement must be willing to put aside personal agendas and ulterior motives. The only way to win is to act as one, with a single purpose.

WHAT DOES VICTORY LOOK LIKE?

Going back to the point at hand, people might think that I just want to win. Who does not want to win, especially where the unborn are concerned? Does anyone like to

lose? No one likes to lose. There are those who are used to it, and those who are not, but no one likes to lose.

So, what does victory look like? Is victory the image of the pro-life movement standing over the bloated corpse of the pro-choice movement, with fist in the air and maniacal laughter? No, that is not my vision of victory. Is victory the image of the pro-life movement dragging pro-choice activists through the streets in humiliation, as the Romans used to drag their conquered enemies through their streets in humiliation? No, that is not my image of victory either. Is victory the image of the Church throttling her enemies? No, that is not my image of victory.

My vision is something like the two brothers in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. At some point, I would hope, the two brothers would have reconciled. The younger prodigal son would say to his brother, "I am sorry I left you to do all the work. I am sorry I abandoned you." The older brother would say to the younger brother, "Yes, but I understand why you did it. Let us just put it behind us."

My vision of victory is like the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. At first there was hostility on the part of the woman, but through the Lord's calm explanations and His desire to not give in or give up, there was a reconciliation between the Lord and the Samaritan Woman, and eventually between the people of the town and the Lord.

I also look back to the end of the Civil War, whenever General Grant gave generous terms of surrender to the Confederacy. During Reconstruction, President Grant did not exact revenge upon the states of the South. Instead, he viewed the Southerners as fellow Americans – wrong and misguided, but still fellow Americans. Victory is about reconciliation. We might remember the words of Bobby Sands, from Northern Ireland, who said that, "our revenge will be the laughter of our children."

If we are to achieve victory, then we might ask, "Victory over whom?" or "Victory over what?" Is this victory over our fellow Americans in some kind of cultural civil war? I look at victory primarily as a victory over barbarity. I look at victory as a victory over the ways in which we close our eyes to others. I look at victory as a victory for the voice of reason over a mode of thinking that places other things as more important human life. I look at victory as a victory for the unborn, who cannot fight for themselves.

We must remember that this is about saving the unborn. We are not trying to win just to say that the pro-life movement has won. If a pro-life victory results in the pro-choice movement fighting back harder, which endangers the lives of more unborn children, then what is the point of winning? The pro-life movement cannot win for its own sake; the winners must always be the unborn children. Any so-called "victory" must be better for them, not any of us.

That is why the backlash from the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is so instructive. Yes, the pro-life movement won a victory, and some children in some states were born rather than lost because of that, but what about the unborn children in other states?

HOW TO WIN

The way to win an actual war is to break the will of your enemy to continue to fight. In a spiritual battle, against the devil and his minions, the devil will always want us to go down the wrong path. Although we cannot stop the devil from continuing to tempt us, which is a battle that will last until the moment of death, we can resist the devil. We can resist temptation. As St. Peter and St. James remind us in their letters, if we resist the devil, he will take flight (1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7).

Whenever it comes to cultural or ideological battles, the key to winning is conciliation. I realize that this seems odd, to win a battle by conciliation, but when we think about it, it is the only way. The strategy of drawing very different lines and having two opposing sides which have nothing in common is fine for an actual war, but not when it comes to values or ideas.

There are all kinds of strange ideas that persist in the world, but the key is that strange or dangerous ideas are pigeonholed and then eventually die on their own. That is the goal: that abortion as a practice and as an idea is marginalized and then disappears. How do we accomplish that? By recognizing that which is good and which is true among the more reasonable pro-choice people, we can provide some conciliation.

Perhaps the following example might help. In the later years of school, math classes usually involved a complicated math problem. Sometimes a simple answer was enough for other problems, but for a more complicated problem, you had to “show your work.” If your teacher was good and reasonable, you might get partial credit for your work, even if the final answer was wrong. So, up to a point, you were solving the problem correctly. Then you perhaps made an understandable mistake. After the mistake, you followed the rules correctly, you just came to the wrong answer because the subsequent steps were based on the mistake. In this case, the teacher might give you partial credit, because you accomplished the first steps correctly. The teacher might acknowledge that you followed the last steps correctly, even though you had the wrong answer.

The same must be true in the pro-life cause. Even if we disagree with people who are pro-choice, we can acknowledge where they seem to have retained some sense, acknowledge that people might think in a right train of thought, but have a premise wrong, and even show compassion for what are understandable mistakes. This will bring people who might only lean pro-choice to appreciate pro-life arguments, and thus come

to value life. Drawing rigid lines is a strategy that will drive some moderate people away from the pro-life movement.

There is a difference between the pro-choice extremists, like the inventor of partial-birth abortion, who must be dead inside, someone who advocates for infanticide, those who do not want to protect a child who survives an abortion, those who proudly brag about their abortions, etc. versus those who lean pro-choice or at least have enough sanity to realize that there should be restrictions on abortion. Those who lean pro-choice are wrong, but their brains are not completely scrambled.

I believe that they may have more in common with people who are pro-life than they do with extreme pro-choice activists. The problem is that such radical laws seem to pass, and that people who lean pro-choice are not willing to stand with pro-lifers to oppose such obvious examples of barbarity. Why is that? Why are those who are wrong but not completely lacking some sanity willing to side with extremists and sick puppies? Could it be that some pro-life leaders drive those who lean pro-choice into the arms of the sickos and extremists? Could it be that pro-life leaders have alienated those who are saner, when the pro-life leaders could have drawn the saner people to themselves and both groups condemned the extremist positions?

I do not believe that lumping every person who is pro-choice together is the best solution. I suppose that this was done out of an interest to be clear about the issue, and I can appreciate that. There is a danger in bringing about confusion: sometimes people think that trying to find common ground sends a wrong message, that the pro-life movement is not serious or consistent about its position. That is not what I am advocating: I do not believe in tolerating a little bit of evil.

What I am advocating is that pro-choice people are wrong, but that there are degrees of being wrong. While there are pro-choice people who are not open to reason, there are pro-choice people who have some degree of sense and are worth the time to talk to, and can be open to hearing alternate points of view.

Once I was invited to a picnic, and there were many people who were friendly and with whom I could speak comfortably. Later, I saw one of the people from the picnic walking a dog and wearing a pro-choice t-shirt. It seemed rather odd, that the person with whom I was speaking before, enjoyably, was someone with whom I would vehemently disagree. Yet, that is the complexity of life. People do not easily fit into the boxes that we would like.

The key to conciliation is that even when people are wrong, it is worth taking the time to find out *why* people feel the way that they do. Perhaps whenever you were in school, you had a teacher who wanted to know why you gave the answer you did, even if it was a wrong answer. Perhaps listening to people who lean pro-choice might yield the

same result: even though they are wrong, it is worth taking the time to listen to them, so that we can understand *why* they believe what they believe.

PRO-CHOICE WEAKNESSES

While part of the strategy for winning over people who lean pro-choice is to be conciliatory, that does not mean that the result is a pro-life movement that is weakly in the middle. We must continue to protect the unborn, regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves, and we cannot stop until total victory is achieved. When it comes to the goal of protecting the unborn, nothing less than complete victory is enough. Yes, the key to victory is conciliation, but while that involves recognizing what there is in common, it means going to the heart of what is wrong and exposing the weaknesses of the pro-choice movement, not to congratulate ourselves, but to bring healing and further conciliation.

We think about the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. Even though the Samaritan Woman was initially hostile to the Lord, the Lord was patient and dealt calmly with her initial hostility. However, the Lord was not afraid to touch upon a subject that was likely a sore spot for the Samaritan Woman: her past husbands and lack of a current husband. The Lord Jesus went right for the most vulnerable part of her life. Yet, the Samaritan Woman conceded the truth. The Lord did not ask her about her husband because He wanted to throttle the woman, but to bring healing to her. He saw past her initial defensiveness to bring deep healing.

Sometimes people argue that this issue has become more divisive than ever. Yes, but there is a reason for that. Originally, no one really had a good idea of what happened in the womb. The pro-choice side essentially used the lack of knowledge for their own agenda. The pro-life side argued that the lack of knowledge should engender a certain caution: if there is a possibility of new life, it should be protected.

Sonogram technology changed that. There are those who argue that pro-lifers have become even more dedicated to the pro-life position. Yes, that is true, because thanks to sonogram technology, pro-lifers are more certain that what is seen in the sonogram is alive, and that life does begin at conception. Pro-lifers cannot unsee the images that sonogram technology has brought.

Strangely, though, those who are pro-choice have become more fixed in their views, even to absurd ends, rather than humbly admitting that they might have to rethink things. Perhaps you have had an experience whenever someone was angry with you, and you remained calm and/or just explained a few facts to the person. Strangely, the person gets angrier in the face of objective facts, as if you were giving those facts to purposely

embarrass the person. It is as if the person is turning the shame of being shown wrong into anger at you. Well, I suspect that something like that may be going on.

I suspect that there are many women who choose abortion because they are scared or feel that there is no way out of the situation, and which I cannot condone but can try to appreciate the fear that might drive someone to be tempted to do so. That does not preclude the very real situation that there are very sick puppies in the pro-choice movement. There is a callousness to these women, and you could show them 1000s of sonograms, I do not know that it would make any difference. It is possible that they are going to pursue a certain lifestyle, and nothing will prevent them from doing so, not even the possibility that they are killing unborn children to do so. I fear that they are willing to go to any end, rather than admit that they are wrong, or listen to anyone who might call them back to reason.

Besides those who pursue a very licentious lifestyle, there are those who want to hold on to a particular cause or movement that needs abortion to be legal in order to keep going. To them, this cause or movement means everything, and there are those who will protect that cause or movement at any cost, even if it means the life of the unborn. There are extremists who no longer consider abortion even as a medical procedure, but who think that every abortion is a win for them, as it is difficult to see where their cause ends and where abortion begins. After all, why not allow children who survive abortions to live? A child surviving an abortion is a political loss?

For any cause or movement to truly continue, there must be a kind of purification or process of weeding out the good from the bad. Whenever movements or causes come up against criticism, it is a moment to rethink things within the movement, to decide what is necessary and what can be dispensed with. This is a pruning moment, and it can be a good thing.

It is important to see what is good about these various movements and keep them, and get rid of whatever is bad within these movements, so that the movements can be stronger, so that these movements and causes can withstand resistance, can stand the test of time, so that the ideas within these different movements and causes will be found worthy. If one has faith in the movement, there is nothing to fear. However, has this happened with the movements that need abortion to sustain it? Instead of facing failure, our society just moves on to whatever is next, to push the boundaries further.

It is not always easy to admit to a mistake. The temptation to blame others for our own mistakes is wrong, but on some level understandable. Yet it is a unique arrogance to want to put others' lives at risk in the womb, because a person is too arrogant or stupid to admit that it is possible that the person made some mistakes, that some ideas might be bad. To continue with any movement, even if it costs the lives of others, is inexcusable. There is a difference between those who might be willing to admit that yes, things have

gone too far and something needs to be done, versus those who are willing to do whatever is necessary, even going to extreme measures, to keep bad ideas going.

In these situations, the key is breaking the tenacious grip of fear or fanaticism or whatever it is that holds people back from understanding what should be obvious from sonograms and from the voice of reason: that life begins at conception, and nothing is so important that it is an excuse to take the life of an unborn child.

ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE PRO-CHOICE

So, the question is how to do this, how to break the grip of fear, fanaticism or whatever else might prevent people from recognizing what is obvious. This is the difficulty. Fear is a difficult thing to overcome, yet it is not impossible.

It can be difficult to engage with people who are pro-choice. Admittedly, pro-choice leaders can be very ungracious winners. There is a lot of self-assurance and the confidence that they are right. There is even a lot of vitriol and disdain for anyone who is pro-life. It can be tempting to give that vitriol right back, but that is not the way forward. Rather, the way forward is to diffuse the situation, but also to see through all of it.

The ridiculous points about an embryo not being human, not alive, all the other rational arguments, the vitriol, the aggressive attacks, I believe that these are all an illusion, a mirage, a mask designed to hide insecurities and fears that lie underneath. Sometimes otherwise rational people can go ape whenever it comes to the issue of abortion. That means that a nerve has been hit.

I believe that there are a lot of defense mechanisms that pro-choice people use to deflect an honest discussion, like offense being the best defense, and jumping on people in speech in order to make the pro-life side silent, or not letting the pro-life side get its message out. These are all defense mechanisms, designed to deflect attention away from the issue, much like a wounded animal defends itself.

I mentioned before that there is a lack of internal soul-searching in some of the movements and causes that need abortion to be legal to keep going. Could it be that pro-choice leaders and people who are still betting on various causes and movements, fear that there are problems, but do not want to deal with them or do not know how to deal with them? Could it be that they fear a complete collapse? If someone is willing to go through the process of sifting through the bad and the good, the person has a certain confidence that there will be good to be found. If someone is afraid to sift the bad from the good, could it be that there is a fear that it will be all bad, and no good, and everything will fall apart?

The utter refusal of cultural leaders and our society in general to be willing to go through the aftermath of the Sexual Revolution and decide to keep the good and get rid of the bad; that no one wants to discuss things like high rates of divorce, high rates of abortion, the breaking down of the traditional family, despite the available evidence that these are failures that will inflict long-term damage upon our society; that even the possibility of discussing these issues hits a nerve with certain people, all point to a deep-seated fear and insecurity within our society.

There is an account of Alexander the Great meeting the Persian King Darius III on the battlefield, both at the Battle of Issus and the Battle of Gaugamela, in which Darius presented himself as a great commander of the Persian army. But besides being a great military commander, Alexander was also a good judge of character. He knew that all of Darius' displays were just bravado, just a way to convince his army of his prowess on the battlefield. Darius did not so much command the Persian army, as he did hide behind the army. Whenever the time for battle came, Alexander went right for the weak spot, Darius himself. Darius, afraid for his own safety, fled at the prospect of the battle coming too near him. The bravado he had shown to his army collapsed, and the army with him. What is at the heart of the pro-choice movement is fear, and the pro-life movement must directly address that fear, rather than giving into all the rational arguments and other efforts to deflect the conversation to another topic.

I realize that whenever people want someone to back off, or that somehow there is a defense mechanism in place, the tendency is to back off. However, backing off usually means that nothing is talked about and more children will suffer as a result. Whenever pro-lifers hit a nerve, then is the time to keep going. I do not mean keep going as a way of throttling the competition, but to get to the heart of the matter so that there can be healing. The Lord Jesus asked the Samaritan Woman about her husband, which was likely a sore spot, not to break her down, but to bring healing. After the Civil War, Reconstruction was uneven and far from perfect, but what did work at that time was healing and reconciliation, rather than triumphalism.

We want to consider what some people have gone through, and that is a betrayal. There are many young people who get caught up in the various lies surrounding sexuality. The thing is, whenever something happens that was not expected or wanted, which inevitably does, the people who promoted the lies are nowhere to be found. The Hollywood producers and directors will not come to help a young woman in those circumstances. Those whom she thought were friends will want to keep their distance. All the people who thought there was fun to be had will split once the fun is over. All the people who have promoted a culture which fed the young woman that wrong message will not help her to bear the consequences.

Unfortunately, sometimes those whom we love or we think that we love can be responsible for a betrayal, but because we love them, we do not want to blame the ones

who led us down a dark path. So, other people become the object of blame, whether pro-life people or someone else. The responsibility of the pain of betrayal gets transferred to someone else, to someone on “the other side,” rather than the people who are responsible for perpetuating lies and encouraging poor decisions. The point is not to tell people “I told you so;” that is not particularly helpful. The point is to understand the pain of betrayal that people might feel, and help them to make good decisions, like protecting the life of an unborn child. The point is also to help people reflect upon who counts as a true friend and who does not.

This is really getting to the heart of the matter. As I said, all the rational arguments and the aggression is a mask, and it is important to see through the mask in order to be able to bring healing. I believe that there are people who lean pro-choice who are open to healing and to listening. Yes, there are the radical extreme people who are willing to destroy society just to prove a point, who are willing to go to whatever end to promote their agenda, even to the point of killing people. They are extreme, and must be acknowledged as such. However, there are also people who realize that sometimes it is important to let go of dreams and face reality.

WHAT THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT MUST DO

In order to get to the heart of the pro-choice movement and avoid all the distractions, the pro-life movement must also avoid any kind of tendency to not face reality and/or silence other pro-lifers who do not agree with the various strategies that have not proven successful, i.e., marginalize all the Cassandras in the pro-life cause. To launch a successful criticism against the pro-choice movement for not facing reality, the pro-life movement must face reality.

In order to distinguish the extreme pro-choice people who are willing to go to any lengths from those who still have enough sense to listen to the voice of reason, the pro-life movement must also be willing to distinguish those pro-lifers who are willing to go to extremes in achieving their goals versus those who are more patient and reasonable in achieving their goals. Abortion clinic bombings are largely a thing of the past, thankfully, but there is more that can be done.

Obviously, not heckling other pro-life Catholics who are praying the Rosary is a good start. If I understood correctly, there was a conversation about why other churches did not help to alleviate the situation with the seminarians being heckled, and the answer was that the churches did not want to do anything because the people who were heckling were more theologically aligned with them, and I suppose that they did not want to be seen on the “side” of Catholics. That kind of nonsense must stop. The pro-life movement can only protect children as one unified movement, not a bunch of independent movements who pursue their own ideas and agendas, fighting amongst themselves. In an

army, no doubt that there are disagreements among individual soldiers, but discipline ensures that the soldiers can put that aside in combat and fight together as one.

Another important step is listening to fellow pro-lifers. We can all understand that whenever there are losses, that pain of losing can be transferred inwards. Leaders can blame themselves, or pro-lifers point at each other. It is understandable to then become intolerant of criticism, but that intolerance towards criticism is not particularly constructive. There must be a desire to rise above bruised egos, to focus on the children and do what is in their best interests.

My vision of victory is not triumphalism, but rather a vision of reconciliation. To achieve this reconciliation at the end, we must be conciliatory now, and that begins with each other. Everyone wants there to be peace, but few are willing to take away what causes division. The tendency is to blame the people who are driven away by these actions, rather than asking why they are so driven away and maybe looking within to find an answer. Whenever we can do that, whenever we can achieve some degree of humility and compassion, people who lean pro-choice may be willing to cross to “the other side” and be open to listening to the voice of reason.

If the pro-life movement is going to confront fears within the pro-choice movement, pro-life leaders must confront fears within the pro-life movement. One fear might be that of being conciliatory, that somehow talking to pro-choice people is a sign of weakness. Conciliation is the only way forward. There are other fears, and they can paralyze a movement, but as St. Joan of Arc once remarked, “I am not afraid; I was born to do this.” We too must realize the importance of overcoming fear, because the unborn are counting on us.

THE ROLE OF MARY IN THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT

To this end, we need a great advocate, and the Mother of God is our advocate in the pro-life movement and the pro-life cause. There are many reasons: she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Life Itself. She dedicated her life to her Son and to His work. Most of all, she has a perfect record against temptation and the power of evil. She was never seduced by the lies of the evil one. She knows how to win, as the brave souls who fought at the great naval battle of Lepanto can testify.

We have likely heard about Our Lady, the Undoer of Knots. This is likely related to the image of binding and loosing found throughout the Bible. But maybe there is more. I want to end with the legend of the Gordian knot. The legend goes something like this: in Phrygia, the people were without a king, and an oracle foretold that the next man driving an ox-cart would be their king. This was Gordias, who was the father of the legendary Midas. Later, out of gratitude, King Midas tied the ox cart to a post with an intricate

series of loops that became known as the Gordian knot. A prophecy foretold that any man who could loosen the knot would become king of all Asia. Whenever Phrygia had become part of the Persian empire, Alexander came to the city, and try as he might, he could not loosen the knot. Then the thought came to him: it did not matter *how* the knot was loosened. In one version of the legend, Alexander cut the rope; in the version more suited to our purposes, Alexander separated the yoke from the cart, allowing the rope to loosen and come apart more easily.

In subsequent centuries, a Gordian knot has become known as a kind of political situation that is difficult to unravel. This makes sense, considering that the future king of Phrygia and all of Asia seemed to revolve around loosening the knot on this cart. In our own day, we have a Gordian knot in the issue of abortion. Yet we have an advocate in Our Lady, the Undoer of Knots. Our Lady can unravel any knot, and she is wiser and more courageous than even the great Alexander. There are several lessons to be learned.

First, it is Our Lady who will untie the knot. Rather than this organization or that organization attempting to unravel this situation, why not let her try? Second, as Alexander understood, *it does not matter how the knot is loosened*. Many people have their own theories about the best way to unravel the knot of abortion. Ultimately, the only solution that matters is the one that works. I do not mean that the most expedient solution, which brings short-term victories but long-term problems, is the best solution. What I do mean is that the pro-life movement must be adaptable to achieve victory, and be willing to engage in strategies that win, rather than staying committed to strategies that do nothing. The best strategy to win is the one that achieves victory.

Alexander tried to loosen the knot the same way that everyone else before him had done. Only with ingenuity and creativity could he solve the puzzle. We must continue to defend the unborn, but ultimately realize that the ingenuity and creativity needed is beyond our abilities. God will unloosen the knot, and Our Lady's solution is the only one that matters. That does not mean that we do not have a part to play, but ultimately, she is the one to untie the knot.

Granted, there are those in the pro-life movement who do not want any part of this, such as the group who heckled those who were praying the Rosary outside the clinic that day. Someone once described the Virgin Mary in the culture of the United States as a kind of crazy aunt, that no one is supposed to talk about or talk to. Well, maybe that crazy aunt is exactly what this country needs.

In order to overcome fear in others, the pro-life movement must overcome fear among its own members. Winston Churchill once quipped, "You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing after they have tried everything else." Why not give Our Lady, the Undoer of Knots, a shot of trying to untie the knot of abortion? Of course, if that were to happen, she would not be a crazy aunt anymore.