

40 Years of Roe v. Wade: 1973-2013

A Message from the Catholic Bishops of Nebraska

January 22, 2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court's tragic rulings of Roe v. Wade and its companion Doe v. Bolton. These rulings legalized abortion during all nine months of pregnancy for virtually any reason.

The results of these rulings have been catastrophic. Most estimates indicate that more than 55 million unborn babies have been killed by abortion since 1973. And this number grows by more than 3,000 every day. In addition, millions of women and men suffer from spiritual, emotional and/or physical wounds from their encounter with abortion. Testimonies about these wounds and the hope and healing of our Lord's mercy are abundant (see hopeafterabortion.org).

Unfortunately, unborn children and their parents are not the only casualties of Roe's impoverished reasoning and destructive license. Roe v. Wade has been used as a legal or philosophical basis to argue for a constitutional right to assisted suicide, for allowing and funding research that destroys human embryos, to nullify federal regulations protecting handicapped newborns from lethal neglect, and to demand legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta summarized the legacy of Roe when she said "America needs no words from me to see how your decision in Roe vs. Wade has deformed a great nation. The so-called right to abortion has pitted mothers against their children and women against men. It has sown violence and discord at the heart of the most intimate human relationships. It has aggravated the derogation of the father's role in an increasingly fatherless society. It has portrayed the greatest of gifts—a child—as a competitor, an intrusion and an inconvenience."

Forty years of Roe v. Wade necessarily calls to mind that in both the Old and New Testaments the number forty denotes a time of preparation and testing, followed by some special action of our Lord. Following 40 days and nights of flooding the earth, God begins a new creation. After 40 years of wandering and testing in the wilderness, the Israelites are brought to the Promised Land. After 40 days of prayer, fasting and temptation, Jesus begins his public ministry of healing sinners and teaching the Good News. The Church imitates this pattern in her 40 days of prayer and fasting in Lent, followed by the Easter Triduum which celebrates the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord—the highest liturgical celebration of the Church year.

As with these Biblical accounts, we pray that 40 years "in the desert" with Roe v. Wade will be followed by what Blessed John Paul II called a "new culture of human life". Although the struggle to build a culture of life will continue to be challenging, there are signs of hope. Large and growing numbers of young people are filling the ranks of the pro-life movement, ultrasound technology has revealed, in unmistakable detail, the humanity of the unborn child, and increasing numbers of post-abortive women are speaking out to say abortion hurts women and women deserve better.

As followers of Christ we should be equally reassured by our faith that this struggle is not premised upon a victory to be achieved in the future but on a victory that has already been achieved by our Lord's death and resurrection. Therefore, our Lord calls us to be faithful and persistent in our efforts to proclaim and defend the sacred dignity of human life.

Jesus Himself demonstrated that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil. As our Church celebrates the Year of Faith, we urge Catholics to join the U.S. Bishops' nationwide call to prayer and fasting for the sake of ending the abomination of legal abortion and renewing a culture of life in our country (see usccb.org/life-marriage-liberty). And we urge Catholics to stay informed and active in this preeminent human rights battle of our time. (Useful resources are available online at nebcathcon.org, and usccb.org/prolife).

As Blessed John Paul II said in *The Gospel of Life*, "There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person's dignity and without respect for his or her rights. Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted."

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