

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

As you probably know, this past Friday I was blessed to join others from our parish and thousands upon thousands of other in attendance at the annual March for Life in Washington D.C. It's actually the largest human rights demonstration in the world. This year was the 45th annual March, and the theme was "Love Saves Lives", which I'll get back to in a little bit.

Last year I shared with you how amazing the speakers at the rally preceding the March were. And I have to say again this year, it was just an amazing line-up of speakers including Tim Tebow's mom, Pam, and President Trump (via live stream from the White House Rose Garden just down the street). But one of the most amazing speakers was Congresswoman Jaime Herrera-Beutler from Washington State, whose family (including four-year old Abigail) surrounded her on the stage as she spoke. The congresswoman shared the story of her difficult pregnancy with Abigail four years earlier. At that time, her and her husband, Dan, learned at 20 weeks that Abigail had no kidneys and that her lungs would be unable to develop. They were told that the baby would either miscarry or she would be born unable to breathe. Either way, there was a zero percent chance of survival – zero. The doctor then told the couple that women usually head across the street for an abortion when receiving this diagnosis.

But they did not go across the street. Rather, Jaime and Dan prayed, cried, and learned to fight for their unborn daughter. “What if God would do a miracle”, Jaime remembered praying? At this point, young Abigail asked out loud in front of everyone, “Was I going to die?” “No,” her mom turned to her emphatically – her and her father were not giving up! “And”, Jaime continued, “through divine intervention and some very courageous doctors who were willing to take risks we now get to experience our daughter”. In fact, Abigail is the very first child known to be born alive and breath on her own without both kidneys. She’s a brave little girl, who received a donor kidney from her father. And “someday”, she says, “she’s going to be the boss of Mommy’s work”! Do I hear President Abigail anyone?

So why am I telling this story – other than because it’s truly miraculous and touching? Well, the theme of this year’s March for Life was “Love Saves Lives”. And, I think you can see how this testimony perfectly demonstrates that slogan. It was the very love that Abigail’s parents had for her that led them to not just give up on their daughter. And what a love they had for her! It was a love willing to sacrifice and to fight for her, and a love that was founded on the truth. You see, Jaime knew that this wasn’t just a lump of cells and tissues in her womb – it was a human being. Therefore, love cannot be divorced from the truth. To really love someone is to tell them the full truth.

As a result, loving another isn't just keeping quiet and saying, "I don't want to offend them". Actually, that's often the opposite of love, because it's a sign of being more worried about myself and how I look, than the real good of another. Is the loving thing to just let a little child put his hand on the burner on the stove because he wants to touch the pretty red light – even if he throws a temper tantrum when you say, "NO"? Or, is the loving thing to stop him from doing something in the first place that's going to hurt him for a long time?

My friends, it's becoming increasingly difficult for our society to hear and receive God's truth. And the result is an increasing number of totally wounded people, broken families, and utter despair. Why do you think God sent Jonah to Ninevah, as we heard in our first reading today? That society had decayed into such evil that within forty days God was prepared to allow their own wickedness to lead them to their own complete destruction. But God didn't desire Ninevah's destruction. He actually desired their salvation. That's why He sent Jonah.

Similarly, God certainly does not desire the murder of millions of innocent babies, but neither does He desire the despair and the moral and emotional devastation that women and men experience after abortion. Like all of us who sin in ways great and small, God the Father calls us to repent – to seek forgiveness for our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – so that we can experience the tremendous release of His love and compassion into our lives. In this way, God, who is love, truly saves lives – not just from physical death, but from the eternal death of separation from Him. Love saves lives. God bless you.