

Friday 22 January, 2010
Mass for the Unborn
37th Anniversary of *Roe V. Wade*
Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Atlanta, Georgia

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The fifth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel begins with the presentation of the world famous Beatitudes and then concludes with the passage that we just heard proclaimed. In many respects this fifth chapter of the Gospel contains a summary of all of Jesus' teaching and the most challenging Christian moral vision to be found anywhere in the Scriptures. In this chapter Jesus commands that His followers must view and live life differently than those who follow the prevailing standards of the times – and that command includes all times.

This chapter insists that we live in a different way from the prevailing and popular opinions of our day, that we treat others – especially those with whom we hold opposing views differently than our raw human and unchecked emotions might suggest, and that we respond to personal and societal challenges in ways that defy the established patterns of behavior. In short, the fifth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel stands as the *Magna Carta* of the Pro-Life Movement.

Our movement, now 37 years old, is a response to the requirements of Saint Matthew's fifth chapter because it has been and remains as a strong but persistent answer to the violence of abortion. For 37 years, people in the Pro-Life movement have called our nation's attention to the violence that has been visited upon countless millions of innocent unborn children with the prophetic and resolute peaceful insistent reminder that every life is sacred before God – that the only real *choice* is for life. It is that witness of truth that has not been silenced or set-aside for these many years and that will continue to declare before the entire world that life is a precious gift from God and must not be destroyed for

the convenience of mankind – no matter what the circumstances might be.

That truth is what we witness and the way that we bear testimony is through the calm yet persistent refusal to be diminished or swayed away from our beliefs.

The 1973 court ruling has been followed by other expressions of the ever-expanding lack of respect for human life – the death penalty was restored in 1976 and even more recently some states have authorized the taking of or the assistance in the taking one's own life. The killing of a child within the womb was the gateway to other ways of desecrating human life and I am afraid others are even now on the horizon.

The Pro-Life Movement has endured the disdain of those within our society who have struggled to explain away the rights of the unborn or pit them against the freedom of choice rhetoric of those who promote a culture of death. It is in those moments of rejection and ridicule that these lines from the fifth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel prove so important: *love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you*. It is the witness of love that remains the true strength of Pro-Life Movement. First there is the love and prayer that we seek to show toward those whose lives have been cut short through abortion and the compassion that we extend toward those who may have shared in tragedy of an abortion and who now seek forgiveness for that offense against life. But our love and compassion must brim over and embrace all those whose lives are threatened by violence – the marginalized, prisoners, those who are strangers in our land, the elderly and critically sick – all those whose lives are considered unimportant must know the love of the Pro-Life Movement and even those who oppose our reverence for all life must know both our determination and our compassionate resolve. We gather on this day to pray – to pray for those whose lives have been cut short, to pray for those whose erroneous attitudes persist, to pray for those within the Pro-Life Movement who may have grown weary, and to pray that our nation will soon abandon every gesture and law that says that life is not the God-given blessing that it always is. Our prayer is firmly founded on the Divine Truth that we find in Matthew's fifth chapter as the way that Christ has commanded us to follow.