

On January 22, 1973, in a 7 to 2 vote, the Supreme Court issued its decision in a case known as "Roe v. Wade," which legalized abortion and severely restricted the states' rights to regulate it. The decision split the country and 35 years later both pro-choice and pro-life camps passionately argue about human life.

Sometimes when you talk about a subject you just can't find the right words. It is at that time that we find others who are more knowledgeable on the subject have the right words so you quote them. Here are a few quotes I would like to share with you.

On February 5th of 2007 Pope Benedict 16th said "Life is exalted as long as it is pleasurable, but there is a tendency to no longer respect it as soon as it is sick or handicapped

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #2258 states: "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being."

Justice Byron White complained in his dissenting opinion that the Supreme Court "values the convenience of the pregnant mother more than the continued existence and development of the life or potential life that she carries." Perhaps Justice White's opinion can be paraphrased in a variety of ways one being, "Our culture values convenience and pleasure more than life itself."

As we approach the altar today and hear God's word in the Scriptures we do so in the context of the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision. It is in such a circumstance that Isaiah's passage stands as a neon sign: "Now the Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb." It harkens back to the earlier words of Jeremiah, "From my mother's womb you pronounced my name."

Last week was the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Then we listened to Matthew describe the event. How John through the working of the Holy Spirit came to know Jesus as the one sent by God. Today we hear John the Baptist, through John the Evangelist, tell us his memory of the event and the meaning he gained from it.

John, the cousin of Jesus, certainly knew his cousin while growing up. The two boys, though living in different places, were only months apart in age. But it is inconceivable that they would not have known each other and have spent time playing together.

It should amaze us, then, that John the Baptist tells us that "I did not know him," but the Baptist is not saying he never met Jesus. He is saying that he never realized who Jesus was. John had preached in the desert that "A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me." John had no idea that the man he had preached about was Jesus.

John had paid close attention to the word of God and had been a man who reflected upon it intensely as a prophet would. In his reflections John comes to understand God's revelation about Jesus. John came to realize and believe that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and John's faith was such that he was compelled to testify to what he knew and believed. The words burned on his lips, he had no choice but to proclaim them to everyone who would listen, and even to those who would not.

While at heart we are a good people, it seems that our culture no longer reflects upon the word of God as did John the Baptist and the prophets before him. Worse, as a culture, we don't reflect on the words and the person of Jesus Christ as did the early Christians. If we spent as much time in the bible as some do with their fantasy leagues think of the knowledge we would have. If we could quote verses of the bible as well as the statistics of a favorite sports figure think of what we would have to fall back on in times of trouble.

We are in a cycle of the church known as Ordinary Time. Let me tell you these times are not ordinary. On this particular weekend we must reflect not only on the issue of abortion but on life in general. The Supreme Court consciously and intentionally avoided defining when life begins. Fortunately the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah stand before us: "from the womb," and the Church has listened to this.

This is a spiritual issue and a spiritual challenge for all of us. Is God the author of life or is He not? Is God involved in the conception of a human being or is He not? These are deep questions for us that affect the very core of our faith in the God of creation and in our faith in the One who gave up His life in order to save ours.

Jesus did not value convenience over life. It was not convenient for Jesus to leave his home in heaven to be born on earth as one of us, but he did. It was not convenient for him to be scourged and suffer death on a cross, but he did. It was not convenient for him to be buried in a tomb for three days, but for our sake he allowed it.

Paul reminds us that we who are sanctified in Christ Jesus are called to be holy. A life of holiness is a life given completely over to the will of the Father who made us. Perhaps many of us are like John the Baptist was for so long. We do not yet know Him. Still, like John, we must struggle to know our God as well as God knows us. We must come to know our God so well that like John the Baptist we will feel compelled to preach what we know. We must have the courage to follow up on the words we said in today's psalm "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will" If we can come to recognize the one who ranks ahead of us, we will know when life begins.