

October 2007

# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop  
110 W. Madison St., Chicago, IL 60602 ❖ E-mail: FriarsLegion@aol.com  
Phone: 312-372-5111, Ext. 338 ❖ Web Site: www.stpetersloop.org

## REASONS FOR HOPE

Every October we observe another “Respect Life Month.” The practice has its origins in the reaction of the Church to the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion, *Roe v. Wade*, a decision which erased the abortion regulation laws of all fifty states, making abortion legal throughout the country and throughout the entire term of a woman’s pregnancy. Most Americans think that *Roe* made abortion an absolute right only in the first three months of pregnancy, and in this most Americans are dead wrong. There is no mystery as to why most Americans have this false idea of what *Roe* actually accomplished. In the media, the universities, the world of political discourse there has been a constant and concerted effort to portray *Roe* as a decision worthy of Solomon, a most practical and moderate ruling that is fair to everyone, and that is therefore accepted by everyone except the intellectually impaired extremists who (really) have no place at the table where reasonable people gather to discuss important issues. Thus we find ourselves in the utterly insane situation, now decades old, in which the vast majority of those responding to the pollsters’ questions say, at the same time, that they support *Roe* and that they favor much tighter restrictions on the right to abortion, the which is like saying that I support the right of every citizen to smoke in public places, so long as people are forbidden to smoke in public places. Well, that makes good nonsense.

1973 seems like a long time ago, and in many ways it is. For those of us who know in our blood that every abortion is the killing of an innocent human life, it has been a lot of years of hoping and working for a change in what is *de*

*facto* the most liberal abortion law in the world. It has been a lot of years of disappointments. We have come to October, to *Respect Life Month*, so many times and we seem to have so little to show for it.

This year is different. At least, it is different in the eyes of Justin Cardinal Rigali, archbishop of Philadelphia, who on August 2 of this year addressed the annual meeting of the diocesan pro-life directors. His speech bears the title *Reasons for Hope in the Pro-Life Movement*.

Cardinal Rigali begins by situating the pro-life struggle within the mandate of the fifth commandment: Thou shalt not kill. This commandment was one of ten given to Moses on Mt. Sinai as part of the covenant that God made with his people Israel – he would be their God, and they were to be his people. At the heart of this covenant was the prohibition against idolatry; Israel was to have no other God but the Lord. Yet in spite of this, idolatry was the first sin committed by the post-Sinai people of God when, in the absence of Moses, she built for herself a golden calf. Just as Israel was first tempted and then seduced into idolatry, so too our modern culture is tempted to abandon life as a value in and of itself and pursue the false gods offered by a medical and scientific establishment that offers us huge benefits if only we will sacrifice to it a few, unimportant victims, such as human embryos.

*Consider the field of biomedical research, the Cardinal says. Caught up in pride and the pressure to be on the cutting edge of science, many scientists take their direction from an un-*

*examined utilitarian ethic that seeks to maximize the good or happiness for the greatest number of people. In this misguided ethic the ends are said to justify the means. Its close corollary, the technological imperative, says, "If we can do it, we should." Any challenge to this imperative is seen as "anti-science" — a step backward.*

*Those who have blind faith in embryonic stem cell research and its so-called "biblical power to cure" (as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called it recently) are worshipping a modern-day false idol. They are putting their faith in an exaggerated view of the wonders of science and in their own ingenuity to overcome disease and aging. It is all strangely reminiscent of the Israelites' worship of the golden calf....*

*The Israelites turned from the God who had just liberated them from the slavery of Egypt to a god who could not save. In our modern context we are given all kinds of promises for all kinds of cures for all kinds of diseases, and many people buy it. Like the Israelites bowing to the golden calf they created, excitement around this potential "healing" has the same idolatrous overtones, based on impatience, stubbornness and disobedience to God's way. But this self-asserted strength is illusory. The cause of life cannot be served by destroying life. The ends (no matter how real or truly beneficial) never justify the means. All people of good will are called to resist the technological imperative and embrace and proclaim instead the inviolable dignity of human life from its earliest stages.*

*The benefits and effects of embryonic stem cell research are all off in the future; in spite of intensive research in this area nothing has as yet come of it. Very much in the present, however, is the ethic of "choice" in the matter of abortion, and its "benefits and effects" are all around us. And not surprisingly, the free license to abort has not produced the promised results. Those who promote abortion as a way to further women's freedom have also exchanged the truth for a lie. Instead of affirming the inviolable dignity of human life, the dignity of women and respect for the integrity of sexual relations and*

*motherhood, they assert a false notion of freedom made in their own image, a self-made ethic that justifies their own choices.*

*We can be tempted to despair at times as disobedience to God's law pervades the culture. Although the abortion rate continues to decline from its high point in the early 1990s, we continue to lose 1.2 million lives to abortion each year in this country alone. Countless women and men involved in one or more past abortions bear the spiritual and emotional wounds of that supposedly liberating "choice."*

**T**empting as despair may be, however, the Cardinal reminds us that *as Christians we have every reason to hope. The risen Christ continues to be at work in — and through — all the baptized members who make up his mystical body, the Church. In the midst of many threats to life, something very encouraging is taking place in our society.* He then goes on to list some of the more salient reasons for hope.

*First and foremost, there is the declining rate of abortions in the U.S., which he had already mentioned, especially among teenagers, many of whom are wisely choosing to abstain from sexual activity — motivated both by religious and moral values and the desire to protect themselves from the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases that today afflict some 60 million Americans. To be free of disease, to be free of the fear of an ill-timed pregnancy, to be free of a broken heart — this is the freedom that we want for our young people, and we rejoice that it is unfolding.*

*The second reason for hope is that the American people are also becoming more pro-life. Major polls in 2006 indicated that support for legalized abortion is waning, with support for Roe v. Wade at an all-time low since the mid-1970s. The Harris Interactive poll — which misleadingly asked about Roe v. Wade as if that decision made abortion legal only during the first three months of pregnancy — found that support has dropped below 50 percent for the first time in three decades. It also showed that 44 percent of Americans said they would support a law in their own state like South Dakota's, banning all*

*abortions except to save the mother's life.* Cardinal Rigali goes on to cite other polls which indicate that the majority of people would limit abortion to the extreme cases of rape, incest, and danger to the life of the mother, and would support parental notification laws, especially for girls under seventeen years of age.

The third reason for hope is the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in April of this year, *Gonzales v. Carhart*, which upheld the federal Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003. Although the victory was a narrow one, the court splitting five to four on the decision, and although the practice banned is used only in very late term abortions and so does not account for very many of the 1.2 million abortions done per year, and although there are other abortion methods that remain legal for the ending of a pregnancy in its eighth or ninth month, Cardinal Rigali insists that *this candid majority opinion is a significant step in the right direction — moving away from the infamous “abortion distortion” in Supreme Court jurisprudence and bringing their interpretation of abortion law more in line with other fields of law.* The upholding of the ban on this particularly gruesome way of doing away with the unborn child *raises awareness about the barbarism of abortion in general*, a positive effect that will help in the continuing struggle to mold public opinion in a more pro-life direction.

The fourth and final reason for hope given by the Cardinal comes from his own city of Philadelphia. On June 7, 2007 by a 9 to 8 vote, the City Council declared Philadelphia to be “a pro-choice city.” After a week of loud and sustained protest against this resolution, the council revisited the issue and revoked it, this time by a vote of 13 to 4. *The City Council had mistaken evil for good — a modern-day act of idolatry; but just as the Israelites’ revelry was silenced upon Moses’ return from Mount Sinai, Planned Parenthood’s celebration came to an abrupt end when the voice of truth prevailed.*

A single robin does not make a spring, and four reasons for hope are just that: reasons for hope and not at all a sign that victory is

either imminent or even assured. The struggle for the hearts and minds of Americans on this issue will continue, probably for a long time. For this is a profoundly moral issue, but it is also a deeply political one, and serious moral and political issues are not settled by a single vote, either of the Supreme Court or of Congress, nor by a single event. In 1973 the pro-abortion forces thought they had won, and won once and for all, but it has not proved to be so. Even in 1973 a significant number of people would not be reconciled to a totally free license to abort, and we have had thirty-four years of that license, the experience of which, as the Cardinal noted, has only moved the country more in the pro-life direction. This is not over yet. The fight will go on in Congress, in state legislatures and in the courts, but the main battleground, the one that really counts, is the battle of public opinion.

In 1858, when Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas met in a series of debates to decide which of them would represent Illinois in the U.S. Senate, the issue was not abortion, but slavery. Slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like abortion in our own, was a great moral and political issue, and Lincoln knew that much as the pro-slavery forces had thought that they had won, by virtue of both the Kansas-Nebraska Act of Congress and the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court, the fight was anything but over. “In this and like communities,” Lincoln said, “public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.” So we may win or lose this or that court case or legislative fight. We may win or lose a whole string of them. The struggle, however, is ongoing, now just as it was then. This October, this Respect Life Month, the signs are more hopeful than they were last year. From that we can and should take strength and comfort, as we look forward to another year of waiting and praying and working.

—Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.



### MEMORIAL VOTIVE LIGHTS

The action of prayer is often accompanied by the gesture of lighting a candle. The candle becomes an offering to the Lord, a sign of the offering of ourselves that we make to God whenever we come before him with a special intention or petition. After a while, we must leave the church to be about other business, but the candle stays, burning constantly in the church even as our prayer remains in the presence of the Lord.

Your gift to Saint Peter's for the year-long memorial votive light helps to support all of our ministry and works. And on our part, you and your intentions are remembered daily in our prayers for our helpers and benefactors.

#### APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

To be lit in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

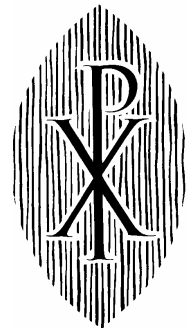
Date candle is to be lit: Immediately \_\_\_\_\_ Specific Date \_\_\_\_\_

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.



#### MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRIARS LEGION *brings with it...*

- A sharing in all of the more than 40 masses offered at Saint Peter's each week
- A sharing in the daily Lauds and Vespers prayed by the Franciscans of Saint Peter's Friary
- A sharing in the Eucharistic Novena of nine Tuesdays before the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua on June 13
- A special Eucharist offered for the living members on the Feast of Saint Anthony on June 13 and on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29
- A special Eucharist offered for the deceased members on All Souls Day on November 2 and on the Commemoration of All the Deceased of the Franciscan Order on November 5
- A sharing in all the ministry and good works done by the Franciscan Friars at Saint Peter's, whom you support by your generosity



#### APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

Please Enroll: \_\_\_\_\_  
as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter's Friars Legion.  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*