

MATTHEW 16.13ff
AN EXPOSITION FOR
THE FEAST OF
THE CONFESSION OF ST. PETER
“Speaking Up for the Sanctity of Human Life”

January 18, 2004

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Grace, Mercy and Peace from Almighty
God, the Father, the Son ✠ and the
Holy Spirit. Amen.

The reading we will look at more
closely this morning is the Gospel read-
ing for the Feast of the Confession of St.
Peter, in which we are told:

*“... but what about you?” he asked.
“Who do you say that I am?” Simon
Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the
Son of the living God.” Jesus replied,
‘Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for
this was not revealed to you by man, but
by my Father in Heaven.’”*

From childhood onwards, we have
come to expect praise or at least to be
given some credit for getting the answer
right when we are asked a question and
do actually “hit the nail on the head.”

Yet, when St. Peter gets it right and
makes the right confession of faith and
gives the correct answer to the question
of Jesus’ true identity, he is not given
all the credit for being right. Instead,
St. Peter is told that the correct answer
he gave did not come from within him,
but was God’s revelation from Heaven
above.

Jesus was teaching that when it
comes to religious truth, we get the right
answers not from within ourselves, but
from Heaven. The reality of that is what
energized the rest of St. Peter’s apostolic
ministry. Although he had his “ups and
downs” as we all know, it seems not
to have daunted the apostle to admit
that, ultimately, Heaven has the right
answers, and Heaven provides the truth
for us on earth.

We heard a further confession of St.
Peter in today’s second lesson when
*“Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to
them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If
we are being called to account today... then
know this... Salvation is found in no one
else, for there is no other name under Heav-
en given to men by which we must be saved’
(Acts 4.18 ff).*

Energized as He was by the truth
from above, St. Peter was able to make
his confession, not just privately be-
tween himself and Christ, but publicly
and before the highest authorities in
government. In his experience, the
words of today’s Psalm came true when
it says, *“I will speak of your statutes be-
fore kings, [O Lord] and will not be put to
shame.”*

Only when one has such a handle on
the truth from above can one testify and
confess in that way. This week at least
100,000 people will converge on our
nation’s capital, as they have done for
several years now, to testify before the
highest levels of government and speak
of the statutes of the Lord, specifically
the statute that concerns the abortion of
unborn children when it says, *“You shall
not murder.”*

They will speak and they will not be put to shame – for what they bear is not a notion from within themselves, or a mere political agenda. What they will bring during this year’s “March for Life” was not revealed by man, but by our Father in Heaven.

Thus says the Lord, the truth from above:

“O Lord, You have searched me and You know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;

You perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways.

before a word is on my tongue

You know it completely, O Lord.

You created my inmost being;

You knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

Your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Heaven revealed that to King David. And it was not mere man but God Himself who also revealed to the prophet, Jeremiah, something man could not have revealed. God said to him, *“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”*

Those words to Jeremiah could have been spoken to Jesus and to you, too. They could be spoken to every child who has ever been conceived. God has a plan for every child He has ever formed in the womb.

Sometimes we think of abortion as a political issue that has no place in the pulpit. And if abortion were purely a political issue, it *would* have no place in the pulpit. But God’s Word has something to say about abortion. Not because the word “abortion” is in the Bible. It isn’t. Yet, Heaven does not have to use that word in order to teach us the sacredness of human life. We can see from what the Bible does say that the procedure we call “abortion” is not being handled in an acceptable way before God.

Abortion may be legal in American courts, but it is certainly not acceptable in God’s courts. Twenty-eight years ago this past week, on January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that unborn children are not persons “in the whole sense.”¹ Not persons in the whole sense?

That’s essentially what the Supreme Court said about African Americans in the Dred Scott decision a century and a half ago – that they aren’t persons in the same sense as white folks. That’s essentially what Adolph Hitler said about Jewish people – that they aren’t persons in the same sense that “pure Aryans” are.

You don’t have to reach back to Nazi Germany to find twisted bio-ethics. Right now, listen to Prof. Peter Singer

who teaches bioethics at Princeton University in 2004. He argues that for at least the first month *after their children are born*, parents should be able to put to death any child who is born with any kind of “defect.”

If you accept the Supreme Court’s argument that we humans can set an arbitrary time when a child becomes a whole person, Mr. Singer’s argument makes perfect sense logically. If we can decide that whole personhood doesn’t begin until after, say, the first trimester in the womb, why can’t we argue that whole personhood doesn’t begin until after the first month out of the womb? Or the first year out of the womb? Or the first ten years? Why don’t we just kill whomever we wish? If we’re going to ignore God some of the time, we may as well ignore him all the time.

In Roman society during the first few centuries after Jesus, if a father didn’t want his baby, he simply threw that child on the trash heap outside the city.² That’s what happens to one baby in the United States every twenty-two seconds³ – she or he ends up on the trash heap outside an abortion clinic. One baby every twenty-two seconds. That’s more than fifty babies just while I’m preaching this sermon!

By the way, not all of those children discarded in Roman trash died. Much to the consternation of the parents who tossed out their offspring, Christians would arrive at night, rescue those little children, and care for them.⁴ Those Christians knew first-hand about being adopted when you expect to die.

We Christians know first-hand about being adopted and rescued from death, too. God has adopted us. And Jesus gave up his life to make it possible! That’s why we Christians can’t just watch callously as one to two million babies a year – *one to two million babies a year* – are killed in the United States before they are born.⁵

You have perhaps heard pro-abortionists talk about the “right to choose.” We need to ask very specifically, “The right to choose *what?*” They are not talking about the right to abstain from sex. That doesn’t seem to be an option to choose as far as they are concerned. No. What is being defended is the right to choose to kill a life that God formed in the womb.

We aren’t comfortable saying it – I’m not comfortable saying it – but it’s the truth: what is being defended is the right to choose *murder*. Abortion is murder. Except on those rare occasions when the life of the mother is at stake – and even then we can’t say the child’s life is more valuable to God than the mother’s, nor that the mother’s life is more valuable than the child’s – abortion simply is not an option.

Some people say that it isn’t right to bring a child into the world when you know from the start that the child’s life is going to be troubled. Well, Jeremiah’s life was troubled from the start. And nobody had a life more troubled from beginning to end than Jesus. But the Lord who formed them in the womb used them to do mighty things in this world. Abortion was common in the Ro-

man world at the time of Jesus. We'd be in a sorry state if Mary had chosen that supposedly easy way out.

Every once in a while you hear the slogan, "Every child a wanted child," suggesting that we want to make sure no child comes into this world unwanted. Well, no child does come into this world "unwanted." A lot of us Christians want that child and are willing to care for that child. But even if there weren't a single Christian who wanted that child, God wants that child.

The One who formed that child in the womb wants her or him so badly that He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross, just so He could have that child – and all the rest of us sinners.

Our Lord's love for us didn't stand idly by when we were dying helplessly in sin. We cannot stand idly by when babies are dying helplessly in abortion. Our Lord's love has been extended to us. Now our Lord's love reaches those unborn children through us. And our Lord's love reaches the parents of those unborn children through us.

Will we make a bold confession of the truth from above or will we just acquiesce to the mere opinions of flesh and blood?

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

In just a few moments Mr. Robert Reddinger is going to make this day, not only the feast of the Confession of St. Peter, but the confession of Robert Reddinger, as through confirmation vows he joins with all of us in the Lutheran Church as we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

It is through such bold confession before the world that we can bring light into darkness. Why? Because the confession we make has divine support, and the power of Christ to build His church is greater than the power of evil.

The Church has no power to tell you what politicians you must support. But the Church has the power to speak out against evil and to speak to politicians as well as to every human soul with the truth from Heaven.

Whether it be to strengthen support in our world for the sacredness of

human life or for any other heavenly cause, Heaven makes use of us as God builds His Church.

What on earth are we doing for Heaven's sake? We are offering ourselves as spiritual sacrifices to God as building materials for Him to use as He builds the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Just as a builder uses bricks or stones to build an enduring edifice, so God uses people as living stones. That is what St Peter describes in the first of his epistles in which he says:

'...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood; offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (I Peter 2.4-5).

Peter ought to know about what it means to be a 'living stone, ... being built into a spiritual house, because the name Peter that Jesus gave to Simon means stone'. Jesus himself gave St Peter that name, that the great Apostle might be a *living object lesson*, illustrating the principle that Christ builds His Church with human stones.

And the foundation of the Church is solid rock -- the solid confession of faith expressed by St Peter when he said:

' (Jesus) You are the Christ, the Son of the living God '.
And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth

will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven''.

No human being is 'the Rock' on which Jesus Will build His Church and we can readily see why. Jesus' Church is built on the solid rock foundation of the God-given faith confessed by St Peter and taught by the other disciples of Christ. It is still that same rock on which we, as living stones, are placed by God at baptism.

May He continue to make each of us into worthy building materials as He builds His Kingdom of life and love among us. And may we ever rejoice to take our place in the building of that spiritual house, redeemed, restored, forgiven. Amen.

(Footnotes)

¹ Quoted from a sermon for 2001 Sanctity of Human Life Sunday by Francis Monseth, titled "Choosing Life in a Culture of Death," p. 1. The sermon was distributed by Lutherans for Life.

² Aadlund, p. 4.

³ Statistic from Monseth, p. 1.

⁴ Aadlund, p. 4.

⁵ Statistic from Aadlund, p. 4.