

Mass of Reparation on the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade 1/21/11

Today, we celebrate the Feast of St. Agnes, virgin and martyr. She was a young, courageous woman of faith who stood up to the powerful political and social influences of her society. She resisted the sexual advances of many suitors and defied the imperial government's efforts to demean her because of her stalwart faith in the Lord Jesus.

The story of young Agnes, may seem an extraordinary plight during a desperate, oppressive time in the history of the Church. The colossal power of the Roman Empire attempted to compel a young woman to conform herself to a demeaning role as an object of men's desires.

Is that so extraordinary? Have such dehumanizing machinations passed away into the history books? The dramatic, brutal circumstances endured by Agnes may not be common in American society today but the unrelenting subjection of young women and men to the unrestrained sexual allurements continues with colossal force. Both prevailing social influences and legal license have promoted the "everyone does it" mentality and the "I'm entitled" style that sways the hearts and minds of many young people.

Our young people and we, ourselves, are under tremendous pressure to conform to a powerful regime of sexual consumption. Sexuality has been converted into a commodity that is exchanged on a free trade market, unencumbered by morality or responsibility. In this ever-growing market, the human person only has value as an object of desire. Both young women and men are subjected to this. Eventually they come to believe it themselves.

We gather here this afternoon to mark the sad anniversary of the Supreme Court decision, Roe v. Wade, that legalized abortion in the United States 38 years ago. We lament the tragic toll of human life measured in hearts lost as well as hearts wounded by the social compulsion as well as the legal license that sanctions the aborting of a human life. After 38 years, conformity is tempting and political efforts to make it compulsory are unrelenting. In this regime, "choice" becomes a euphemism for desperation and despair.

This has happened, in large part, because sexuality is not about creating life. It has become a commodity. A child conceived in a sexual union has become just an accessory that one chooses as part of the package or not.

That is why the memory of St. Agnes is worthy of our consideration on this tearful anniversary. St. Agnes knew that she was worth more than lurid glances of her seducers or degrading judgments of the Empire. She was sure of the Lord's loving look. She was convinced that she was part of a new creation. She was familiar with the words of St. Paul to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3.28) Her conviction, her faith in these words, gave her a dignity that no one could take from her. She possessed the freedom to act as a courageous woman against the social conventions and political pressures of her time. She believed that Christ had called her to climb the mountain of grace as he had called Simon Peter, James and John in the gospel today. She was convinced that she was part of God's people and that God would be with her to the end.

St. Agnes was given the grace to endure what she did. She also had learned what she should do. She heard about the Lord Jesus from someone who loved her enough to share the good news. She followed the example of others who were faithful disciples of the Lord. Her community of faith persuaded her that she was apple of God's eye. She had been purchased with the price of Christ's blood. She had also seen the courage and stamina of other Christians who boldly practiced their faith. All this helped her to conform her heart to Christ. She did not need to conform to anyone else's expectations.

This task of informing and inspiring the hearts and minds of young people must continue today. It is not just a matter of teaching them to choose life. We must persuade them that God has already chosen them. He has loved us first. We must communicate this undying love to everyone, especially the young. The truth of God's love reveals the truth and beauty of our human dignity. When we are convinced of this, there is only one choice, to love as we are loved, to give the life we have been given by Christ.