

Prayer & Reflection  
Bishop Richard Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines  
Iowa State Capitol  
February 8, 2010

Thank you for coming today and expressing your strong convictions for the life and dignity of every human person from the moment of conception to natural death.

I open our prayerful reflections with excerpts from Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have probed me, you know me:  
You know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar.

...

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works!

My very self you knew;  
My bones were not hidden from you,  
When I was being made in secret,  
Fashioned as in the depths of the earth.

...

How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them!  
Were I to count, they would outnumber the sands; to finish, I would need eternity.

...

As we reflect upon this great gift of life – “Knit in the womb of our Mothers,” we do so as a “Pro-Life” community. In this public building where laws are formulated we come to express our disagreement with unjust laws that permit the taking of the life of the unborn child in the womb.

But there is something more involved than merely addressing a human law created by legislative bodies and interpreted by courts. There is something deeper here. It is inscribed in the hearts of all humankind, something bigger than the laws which spur disagreement. We are here because of a belief not about laws but about life which guides our way of thinking and acting.

You and I and all our fellow humans are blessings of a great creative force which orders time and all creatures. Along with the founding fathers of our country, we call that creative force, God. But those who do not believe in a supreme being recognize there is something set apart . . . those words “set apart” are the root of the word “sacred” – about human life.

This reality of life is governed by “natural law.” This embraces the idea that there are codes and expectations surrounding certain key aspects of our world that are set forth by nature, which is valid across the human spectrum of life. Our founding fathers categorized such as certain truths which are “self-evident.”

But does natural law encompass a right to be born, a right to life?

Something deep within us – says yes there is. The excruciating pain that women and men feel for months or years after abortion tells us something about natural law and a right to life. The fact that the phenomenon of legal protection of abortion procedures is relatively recent reversing standing history says something about natural law and a right to life. The most recent discoveries of scientific embryology speak to the natural law and the right to life.

As we pray to God that these laws may be changed, let us recognize that it will be necessary for us to facilitate the changing of hearts of all our fellow citizens so that they are moved to recognize the truth of this great gift of life. Let us also recognize our own part in helping others so that all of us together can approach life from the common understanding of the sacred- or set apart nature of human life. For laws that are changed by waving signs or by getting enough people to join a movement are written on paper and regrettably sometimes do not last longer than a term of office.

In order to insure credibility of our beliefs and convictions about the lawmaking side of abortion, we must be committed to the life and dignity of every person at every stage of life. We are called to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah who delivered God’s word in this way:

“This rather is the fasting I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke;

Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.

Then your light shall break like the dawn, and your wound shall be quickly healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Prayer:

I invite you now to join with me in prayer . . .

Let us pray

All powerful and ever-living God we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.

All things are of your making

All times and seasons obey your laws  
But you chose to create us in your own image  
Setting us over the whole world in all its wonder.  
You made us stewards of creation  
To praise you day by day for the marvels  
Of your wisdom and power.

Grant that in accord with the natural law, we strive to protect life from the moment of conception to natural death with legal protection achieved with dignity recognizing that when we do this for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do it for you.

Grant also that we may further demonstrate our commitment to human life by our willingness to serve women and men experiencing difficult situations who manifest great fear in giving birth to the children in their mother's wombs.

Finally grant that we might serve you through a fasting of charity and justice for our neighbor that follows your son, Jesus, born of Mary in his example of consummate self-giving love.

We ask this Father, through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, in union with the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

Amen