



Diocese of Dunkeld

Bishop's House, 29 Roseangle, Dundee DD1 4LS

31st May 2017

Feast of the Visitation of our Lady, Day for Life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Each year, around the Feast of the Visitation of our Lady, on the 31st May or the nearest Sunday, we celebrate the Day for Life, a day dedicated to raising awareness about the meaning and value of human life at every stage, and in every condition.

Human life is a sacred and precious gift from God and must be treated with the upmost respect. This is true at every moment of life, from its first beginnings to its natural death. In the womb we grow and develop as full human beings, not as potential human beings. We read in the Old Testament: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I sanctified you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

The Day for Life 2017 has a particular poignancy and significance. This year marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of the passing of the Abortion Act in the United Kingdom. Since the Act was passed in the UK more than nine million unborn children have been killed and countless mothers and fathers have been hurt by abortion. Indeed, the World Health Organisation, an agency of the UN, has stated that abortion is the leading cause of death worldwide, ending the lives of more than 40 million children each year.

The right to life is the most fundamental of all rights. Without that right all other rights are lost. At present, human life in the womb is not well protected, leaving unborn babies at risk of losing their lives to abortion, and mothers to the damage of abortion. Vulnerable people such as the disabled, elderly and frail are increasingly in danger from pressures to introduce assisted suicide or euthanasia. Campaigners have been relentless in pursuing their aim of introducing such laws. Worryingly there is a broad coalition and considerable political support for extending the threats to life including extending abortion to birth for any reason. Even more worryingly as the culture of death has grown the right to conscience is also becoming increasingly eroded.

Thus, this year's Day for Life is not just an occasion to reflect on the sacredness of human life but an opportunity for all of us to renew our commitment to living out our baptismal promises, by putting our faith in the sacredness of life into action.

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Catholics, by nature of their baptism, are duty bound to participate in shaping the moral, social and economic character of the world. Indeed Jesus calls us to be 'salt for the earth. ...light for the nations.' (Mathew 5:13-14). As the Holy father, Pope Francis, reminded us last month: "There is no more important work" than the pro-life movement.

As we reflect on the fiftieth anniversary of the Abortion Act we express gratitude to those who have worked tirelessly to try with God's grace to build a Culture of Life and to counteract the Culture of Death. We especially remember the works of organisations such as the 'Cardinal Winning Initiative', 'SPUC Scotland' and '40 Days for Life'. As with the Church herself, these organisations have lobbied, counselled and prayed to bring about change. Perhaps what is most striking on this anniversary is the fact that so many young people have taken up the cause for life. In this respect, 'Project Truth', a wonderful team of young people who travel across Scotland every summer to educate the public about the humanity and beauty of every unborn child is especially worthy of note.

We as a Catholic People, supported by the Bishops of Scotland, will always speak out on behalf of the sanctity of every human life wherever it is threatened, from conception to natural death, and we urge all people of good will to do likewise.

Pope St. John Paul II once said that every human life is "unique and unrepeatable." On this Day for Life, in this significant anniversary year, each of us can ask of him or herself a simple question: What unique and significant action can I do to help promote and protect the rights of the unborn child?

With every blessing and thanks for your prayerful and material support and work for the protection of life,

+ *Stephen Robson*

Yours devotedly
+ Stephen Robson Bishop of Dunkeld
Bishop Promoter of the Day for Life