

“Equal from Day One – a message for LifeStream20”, 13th June 2020

I warmly greet all of you taking part in “LifeStream 20”. Thank you for all that you are doing to protect life and to promote the care of the most vulnerable in our society. We would of course prefer to be walking together in the March for Life. That is not possible today. But it is good to have kept this day and to mark it in this way.

Several years ago, a woman asked to see me because, she said, she wanted to organise a memorial service for her dead child. Ten years before she had an abortion, but what she had done always haunted her. In prayer, she said, she realised she needed to name her child, and to ask the child's forgiveness. The service was in order to remember the short life of her lost child, to ask forgiveness and to remember that her child now had the fullness of life with God. Her child was with Jesus, in His kingdom. Knowing this gave her great comfort.

We know that when the Abortion Act was introduced just over 50 years ago, it was meant to be a cautious, limited measure. Instead, it has led to the abortion of well over nine million children in the UK. It was meant to have strict safeguards, so that the law could not be abused. Instead we have seen abortions for all sorts of reasons and heard cases of doctors pre-signing stacks of abortion forms without ever seeing the women they were supposedly treating. The numbers of repeat abortions and abortions on the grounds of disability has skyrocketed. Late-term abortions for babies with disabilities have increased by 270 per cent since 1995.

We have also seen headlines indicating that some doctors want abortion to be more readily available beyond 24 weeks and well into late pregnancy. More recently, at the beginning of ‘lockdown’, the Health Secretary introduced “temporary measures” to allow early abortions at home without any medical supervision present. Having originally withdrawn the proposal because of the outcry, such measures were then introduced for a period of two years or until the virus is eradicated. This means that since ‘lockdown’ it has been legal for women to have home

abortions, potentially also putting her own life at risk. Recently, it was highlighted in the national press that because of this ruling, a woman at 28 weeks pregnant, managed to get pills for a home abortion. This, of course, is illegal, as the cut-off point is 24 weeks.

In the face of such a relentless pursuit of death dealing, we can sometimes feel overwhelmed. Today, we proclaim together that all are “Equal from day One”. Do not give up your efforts on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society. It has often been remarked that the attitude to abortion in the UK today, is like that of people to slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1850, lots of good and thoughtful people defended the institution of slavery. Now, only insane people would. In 2020, lots of decent and thoughtful people defend the pro-choice position. Through our efforts, working with people of all faiths and with people of good will, we hope to hasten the day when only insane people think this is okay.

The pro-life message that we promote is a great service to the whole of society. It is interesting that during this time of lockdown, people have again and again spoken about two important things – community and solidarity. There has been a growth in both. Hopefully, some of that will stick when the restrictions are lifted.

Will more and more people recognise that solidarity is especially needed for the most unprotected in our society. Will more people see that life is sacred, a mystery? We hope so. Life must be protected, nurtured, respected. When the value of life is compromised or diminished, all life is at risk. When we give the State the power to determine which human beings are worthy of living and which should be eliminated, we are beginning down a ‘slippery slope’ which makes possible every kind of injustice and violation of human dignity.

From the loving heart of Christ’s followers, I want to thank all of you for all that you do to animate in our country a concern for life in all its vulnerability. May we all continue to prophetically proclaim life, that “all are equal from day one”.

May God bless all our efforts. And now it is my privilege to call down God's blessing upon you all.....

All-powerful God, you always show mercy to those who love you. You are never far away from those who seek you. Remain with your servants on this journey and guide their way in your love. Shelter them with your protection by day; give them the light of your grace by night; and, as their companion on the journey, bring them to their destination in safety. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

And May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit come down upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

Pray for me.

God bless you.

+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth