

Dear Friends for Life,

I pray that you and your families are all well. In the last few weeks, there is no question our mettle has been tested on so many fronts – physical, emotional and spiritual. So much seems to be driven by *fear*, but we should not allow ourselves to become paralyzed or discouraged. It is said that some version of “Be not afraid” is found in the Bible 365 times, implying a divine directive for every day of the year.

God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress.
Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken and mountains quake to the depths of the sea,
Though its water rage and foam and mountains totter at its surging.
The Lord of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob. Psalm 46: 2-4

A few words on the Rosary

Before I began this monthly letter, I prayed a Rosary for all of you for courage and perseverance during these challenging and unprecedented times. May is the Month of Mary, and I know no better way to honor and invoke her motherly charity towards us, than to lean on this most powerful weapon against all that afflicts us. At Fatima, the Mother of our God gave her name as “Our Lady of the Rosary” and appealed to the three children to pray the Rosary daily, with particular attention to meditating on the mysteries.

Pope St. John Paul, in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, exhorted, “The family that prays together stays together.” Although released in 2002 in the aftermath of 9/11, this apostolic letter pointed to the need for a “revival” of the Rosary to implore from God “*the gift of peace*.” Now in 2020, we find ourselves, indeed the worldwide community, in another state of unrest with the COVID-19 pandemic -- not just in our communities, but possibly in our homes, and even, in ourselves. However, at this time when families are spending more time together because of mandated stay-at-home orders, there are certainly new stressors. But there are also new occasions to win victory over the lack of peace that might prevail in our hearts and homes. It is very easy to apply directly to us what St. John Paul encouraged:

Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the center, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.

So, instead of another round of “binge TV,” would a family Rosary be possible? For many, we have the time, we have the opportunity with family members at home together, and we most definitely have the need!

A new law that violates human dignity in New York State

At the same time that this pandemic crisis is whirling around us, it is important not to become so distracted so as to ignore the world that continues “in the background.” For example, the New York

State budget passed on April 3 included a measure to legalize **commercial gestational surrogacy**. This was a high priority advocated by the governor despite strong opposition by the New York State Catholic Conference. The law allows monetary compensation for a woman to carry a pregnancy intended for another couple -- essentially, a mother's womb may now be rented in New York. Although recently such "commerce" has gained wider acceptance across the globe, it is gravely problematic. **It is a most natural human desire to have children and one that is pleasing to God when we are open and encouraging to life. However, when it is taken out of the natural order of God's divine plan for love between a husband and wife, it becomes exploitative and displeasing to God.**

Under commercial gestational surrogacy, human life is produced in a laboratory through *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), which itself entails dangerous risks to the egg donor, but also violates the divine meaning of the marital act, that is, the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of sexual union. The storing or discarding of unused embryos and selective reduction of excess pregnancies (i.e. abortion) are hallmarks of IVF that highlight the disregard for human life inherent in the process. Every child has the right to be created in the loving embrace of his mother and father, not a step-wise scientific protocol; moreover, human dignity would also dictate that a child (as well as the woman's womb) should not be the object of a financial transaction. The casualties are threefold:

1. women are exploited for their eggs and their wombs, with a particular risk to those who are socioeconomically challenged and may be coercively enticed by a price tag that undermines their health and their dignity;
2. children are treated as property rather than the supreme gift of sacramental marriage – in some cases there could be a bewildering *three sets of parents* potentially identified for a child: the egg and sperm donors, the child-bearing woman and her spouse, and the adoptive parents;
3. the family, that is what St. John Paul II called the sanctuary of life, is fractured and distorted by human will – and ultimately our culture suffers.

The "Boss Bill"

In November of 2019, the "**Boss Bill**," long promoted by Planned Parenthood, was signed into law in New York State. This law requires that all employers, without exemption, must not discriminate against a job candidate who holds beliefs and behaviors regarding "reproductive health issues" contradictory to the mission of the organization and cannot require an employee to submit to a moral code of conduct. This law was targeted directly at religious organizations. For example, a Catholic pregnancy center would be prohibited from discriminating against a job candidate for office manager because she had just arranged an abortion for her pregnant teenager.

Other pending legislative threats to human life and dignity in New York include:

- **Assisted Suicide.** In this bill, a person with a so-called terminal condition would be allowed to take a lethal prescription, ordered by a physician, with the intention to take his own life. Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia are always morally wrong because all human life, even in its most debilitated state, is sacred – it must be supported with love and true compassion, not abandoned to the ultimate despair of self-annihilation.
- **Human Papilloma Vaccine (HPV) Mandate.** This would require all children over eleven years old to receive the HPV vaccine intended to prevent a sexually transmitted disease that in some

cases can lead to cancer. Although there are valid concerns that the vaccine could promote promiscuity and is not protective against other risks, there can be morally legitimate reasons some parents might choose to vaccinate their children. The objectionable aspect here is that such a mandate undermines the *parental right* to determine what is best for one's own children. It is also blatantly inconsistent with other laws that require parental consent for body piercing, tanning salon services, etc. in minors.

- **Legalization of Prostitution.** This would make it legal to buy and sell sex under most circumstances. This would decriminalize an industry that is notorious for abuse and violence. Like the surrogacy issue, it also profits from the commodification of human beings and strips any notion of human dignity from these victims.
- **Legalization of Marijuana.** Marijuana possession was decriminalized last year but this bill calls for the full legalization of recreational marijuana and creates a tax-generating market for it. Legalizing marijuana (which is known as a “gateway” drug to other addicting substances) seems particularly irresponsible in the midst of an epidemic of opioid addiction. There are concerns that usage by minors will increase, suicide rates could escalate, and that accidental injury and death “under the influence” will rise with legalization of marijuana.
- **Emergency Contraception on Campus.** This would require all public college and university settings to provide information promoting emergency contraception drugs. The moral concerns here revolve around increasing sexual risk-taking behaviors, encouraging this as a form of birth control, and ignoring that none of these agents protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Most of all, the propaganda on campuses explicitly insists that these agents do not cause abortion, but this is *only* because the language used by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that pregnancy (conception) has not occurred until implantation of an early embryo on the uterine wall, even though an early embryo exists before implantation and can be extinguished by any of these emergency contraception methods. Emergency Contraception is indeed abortifacient, even if the language has been manipulated to disguise this fact.
- **Prolife Pregnancy Centers Disclosure.** This legislation would mandate a government-designed statement for pregnancy centers to disclose that they do not provide abortions— i.e. this is a case of targeted *coerced speech* (forcing language to a specific group). In 2018, the Supreme Court in *NIFLA v. Becerra*, overturned a similar law in California on the grounds it violated the constitutional right to free speech of life affirming pregnancy centers.

Is this what we want for New York? We must remain vigilant and oppose these legislative issues. Most of all, we have a responsibility to know what our elected officials are proposing and oppose bills when they are not morally legitimate. It is a crucial element of proper conscience formation to know the legislative issues, and know where political candidates for office stand on them, for our votes in the election booth can directly translate into the passage (or not) of unjust, immoral legislation.

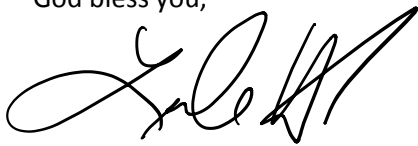
It must be stressed that there are many issues on which two faithful people, passionate in their convictions, can hold diametrically opposite positions and yet both can be morally legitimate. However, **issues that involve the sanctity of human life and the incomparable dignity it holds are not negotiable**; that is, in matters of human life, *especially in the most vulnerable stages at the beginning and end of life*, two faithful people *cannot* hold opposite views that are simultaneously morally legitimate. Abortion,

euthanasia and all that corrupts the sanctity of marriage and the creation of life are intrinsically evil and cannot be justifiable or approached with compromise. Voting for candidates who hold positions that endorse these evils is morally problematic and is rarely, if ever, justifiable. To do so, one must ensure a meticulous formation of conscience and perform a most scrupulous evaluation of competing interests that determines the issues are proportionate in gravity—that is, equally “non-negotiable” (and more often they are not). For example, if both candidates support abortion, but only one also endorses euthanasia, one might be able to justify a vote for the candidate who does not also support euthanasia. It can get complicated, but it is worth understanding the issues, the candidates’ platforms, our moral duties, and what is at stake—in this world and the next!

“What have you done?” (Gen 4:10) How we vote matters because how our elected officials legislate determines whether we are a land of just laws—or not. One day we will each be judged for what we ourselves did and did not do, and that will include the votes we cast that enable legislators and officials to enact and enforce laws that build a culture of life—or a culture of death.

So, in these very serious of times, we implore Our Lady of the Rosary to intercede for us. As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, let us pray for strength and hope. But let us also beg her intercession that as we approach Pentecost, we may be humbly receptive to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and use them to build the civilization of life and love that this world so desperately needs.

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. J. Hall', written in a cursive style.