



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

# Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



October 2021

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Dear Friends for Life,

As Respect Life Month draws to a close, there are many reminders that respecting life is not a day or month-long event but rather a pursuit for every day of the year. There are both painful reminders (such as the House passage of the Women's Health Protection Act<sup>1</sup>) and optimistic ones (for example, the Texas and Mississippi laws that place limits on abortions<sup>2</sup>) that tell us we must persevere: despite challenges, there is progress being made in building a culture of life—even in a hardened society.

## PRAY FOR DOBBS

Beginning in December, the United States Supreme Court will hear arguments in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. At the heart of the challenge is Mississippi's Gestational Age Act which bans abortions after fifteen weeks.<sup>3</sup> For all the claims that this law is extreme, consider that across Europe almost all countries restrict abortion after fifteen weeks—and the majority of these after twelve weeks.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the first trimester (twelve weeks), a fetus measures about four inches and is fully developed with all of its organs formed.<sup>5</sup> We can see then that the Mississippi law is not extreme at all. In fact, for all those innocent human lives still at risk, it is not enough!

The implications of this case to *Roe v. Wade* (and for further legal protections of the unborn) could be very significant. And so, we must pray! Over the next nine months, there is a national prayer event, “**Pray for Dobbs**” in which we encourage your participation at both the individual and parish levels. On the

<sup>1</sup> [H.R. 3755: Women's Health Protection Act of 2021 -- GovTrack.us](#)

<sup>2</sup> 87(R) SB 8 - Enrolled version (texas.gov); <https://law.justia.com/codes/mississippi/2018/title-41/chapter-41/gestational-age-act/section-41-41-191/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://law.justia.com/codes/mississippi/2018/title-41/chapter-41/gestational-age-act/section-41-41-191/>

<sup>4</sup> [On-Point-63.pdf \(pcdn.co\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Fetal development: Month-By-Month Stages of Pregnancy \(clevelandclinic.org\)](#)

22<sup>nd</sup> of each month from October to June, all people of faith across the United States are invited to join in prayer and fasting for a just outcome to this case which would protect millions of children and their mothers from the grave harms of abortion.<sup>6</sup> For God all things are possible! (Mt 19:26)

## THE IMAGE OF GOD, RESPECT LIFE MONTH, AND BEYOND

*“God created man in His image. In the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’”*  
(Gen 1:27-28)

It is most fitting that we celebrate the feast of Pope St. John Paul II during Respect Life month. His preaching on human life, marriage, and the family was prolific throughout his pontificate, but probably most notable in his Wednesday audiences (from 1979 to 1984) compiled in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* as well as his masterful encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*.

There is one particular concept that Pope St. John Paul II developed more fully in his Theology of the Body catechesis and which is critical to a deeper understanding of the inviolable dignity of the human person: *imago Dei* or the image of God. Man is composed of a body and soul. In our solitude, we bear likeness to God mostly in the soul: we are rational beings with free will, destined for eternal life.<sup>7</sup> And in this alone, we have immeasurable value and dignity.

But in communion, we bear likeness to God through the body; that is, man and woman in marriage beget a child, the natural fruit of marriage which brings about family, and in this we image God in the Blessed Trinity.<sup>8</sup> This is breathtakingly profound and beautiful: the language of the body (which can be authentically articulated *only* in the complementarity of the sexes), expresses the “perfect distinction, unity, and fruitfulness” of the Blessed Trinity!<sup>9</sup> In the unreserved giving of self and receiving of other in marital love, the body is witness to the fundamental gift of both creation and its source, the Creator.<sup>10</sup> And in this, the sacred dignity of the human person is evident in a more expansive way through the dignity of the matrimonial covenant.

This spousal relationship of total self-giving and receiving also reflects the union of Christ and His Church (Bridegroom and Bride). Moreover, it is through the Holy Eucharist, when Christ, *in substance*, is present in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, that we, the members of His Body, the Church, are *substantially* united with Him. At the same time, we are spiritually united with our brothers and sisters of the Faith, building up the Mystical Body of Christ the Church, our (human) family—again revealing the Trinitarian image in which we take part.<sup>11</sup>

This is why in [Bishop Barres’ homily](#) for Respect Life Sunday, he emphasizes repeatedly our interconnectedness made possible not only through the marriage and family (even into eternal life through

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<sup>6</sup> [Home | Pray for Dobbs](#)

<sup>7</sup> Bennett Kelley, C.P., *Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1969), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Kelley, *Baltimore Catechism*, 31

<sup>9</sup> Christopher West., *Theology of the body explained*. Revised edition. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2007), 108.

<sup>10</sup> West, *TOB*. 182

<sup>11</sup> [Theology of the Body: An Intro | Human Life International \(hli.org\)](#)

the Communion of Saints) but also, and most importantly, through the Holy Eucharist.<sup>12</sup> The notion that we are created in the image of God, *imago Dei*, is helpful to understanding the sublime dignity bestowed on the human person through these relationships, and in pondering the incomprehensible greatness of the Creator by Whose goodness all this is. It also compels a radical ordering of our lives to Love and His divine will, for who would not want what is all good? Then chastity, modesty, traditional marriage, etc. are not impositions when we see that they engender what is truly good for us now and for our eternal destiny. Furthermore, participation in the mystery of the Eucharist is no longer a weekly obligation but becomes a fervent longing for the Beloved in Holy Communion, which as we have seen joins us with Him and with others in the Body of Christ.

This magnificent reality of the Holy Eucharist is available to us every day all over Long Island and across the world, but it is too often neglected, dismissed, or unappreciated. This sad state underscores the need for a dramatic Eucharistic Revival and Eucharistic Evangelization for which the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has called.<sup>13</sup> Let us each begin with prayer, a renewed sense of awe at Mass, and perhaps an hour of Eucharistic Adoration each week. Most importantly, let us live our lives like we truly believe we are the *imago Dei*. Finally, if you or someone you know is struggling with *transubstantiation* (bread and wine becoming the actual Body and Blood of Christ in substance), arrange to speak with your priest, try visiting the Blessed Sacrament in person at your parish, and check out the virtual museum of [Eucharistic Miracles](#) organized by Blessed Carlo Acutis.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

As we conclude Respect Life month, the recent 40 Days for Life campaigns will be closing, but the need for continued prayerful witness at these busy Planned Parenthood facilities continues. Even if you have not been a part of this effort, please consider that every pregnant woman who walks into an abortion facility is created in the *imago Dei* and carries within her womb another *imago Dei*—and your witness can save both of them from the harms of abortion! For those suffering from the trauma of a past abortion, please call our Project Rachel hotline (516)766-2538 because you are not alone and healing is within your reach.

This week (and repeated next week) there is an important teen suicide prevention webinar hosted by the Archdiocese of New York and featuring experts in the area including Fr. Chris Alar of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. It is free to register [here](#).

November is a wonderful time to remember those who have gone before us, especially those in our family trees. This is the Communion of Saints “in action” and highlights our interconnectedness through the *imago Dei* and through which we glimpse our eternal destiny. You can find some helpful resources [here](#).

Check out our website and future newsletters for more information regarding upcoming events, e.g. National Night of Prayer for Life, the March for Life, etc.

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<sup>12</sup> [Microsoft Word - 27th Sunday \(B\) Respect Life Sunday and Marriage.docx \(drvc.org\)](#)

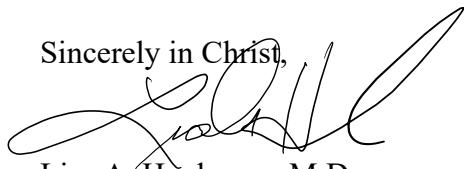
<sup>13</sup> [The Meaning of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church | USCCB](#)

Finally, remembering that prayer is our most powerful weapon to combat evil, we close with the prayer Jesus taught His disciples because it is the most perfect of prayers and summarizes the whole Gospel:<sup>14</sup>

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, Who art in Heaven,  
    hallowed be Thy Name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done  
    on Earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses as we  
forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
    but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Sincerely in Christ,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

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<sup>14</sup> Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 2774-5.