

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF
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NATIONAL CATHOLIC PRAYER BREAKFAST

***“CELEBRATION OF THE TEACHINGS
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH”***

**WASHINGTON, D.C.
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Introduction

1. I am deeply honored to give the Keynote Address at this annual gathering of Catholics to pray for our nation. I express my heartfelt esteem and gratitude to those who, each year, organize and support the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast.

2. The theme of this year’s Breakfast is most fitting to the difficult time through which our nation is now passing. Before the fundamental and great challenges which we as a nation are facing, how better to express our patriotism than by celebrating the teachings of our Catholic faith. The most treasured gift which we as citizens of the United States of America can offer to our country is a faithful Catholic life. It is the gift which, even though it has often been misunderstood, has brought great strength to our nation, from the time of its founding. Today more than ever, our nation is in need of Catholics who know their faith deeply and express their faith, with integrity, by their daily living.

3. Although I no longer have my residence in our beloved nation, I am no less bound to practice the virtue of patriotism, taught and exemplified by Our Lord during His public ministry. It is Our Lord Who gives us, in the Church, the grace to practice patriotism as a fundamental expression of the bond of charity which we have, in Him, with our fellow citizens. From my earliest formation in the life of the faith, received at home from my parents and in the Catholic schools, it was clear to me that duty to one’s nation, to one’s fellow citizens, is integral to our life in Christ in the Church. In the *Baltimore Catechism*, the virtue of patriotism is joined with filial piety. These essentially connected virtues, in the words of the Catechism, dispose us to honor, love and respect our parents and our country (Revised Baltimore Catechism and Mass, No. 3, New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1949, 1952, no. 135). Surely, the most fundamental expression of patriotism is daily prayer for our homeland, the United States of America, her citizens and her leaders. Our participation in the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast is, I trust, an extraordinary expression of the daily prayer

which we all offer for our country, as good Catholics and, therefore, good citizens.

4. It pleases me that today’s celebration included a presentation by Mother Shaun Vergauwen, Superior General of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist. I have known Mother Shaun’s religious congregation for all the years of my priestly life. The consecrated life of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist is an inspired witness to the truths of our Catholic faith, especially what pertains to the Gospel of Life, and, therefore, also makes a strong contribution to the good of all citizens in our nation.

Growing Crisis in Our Nation

5. I come to you, this morning, with the deepest concern for our nation. I come to you, not as someone who stands outside of our nation but as a citizen who, with you as fellow citizens, takes responsibility for the state of our nation and, therefore, cannot remain indifferent and inactive about what most concerns the good of us all, especially those among us who are small, weak and defenseless.

6. Over the past several months, our nation has chosen a path which more completely denies any legal guarantee of the most fundamental human right, the right to life, to the innocent and defenseless unborn. Our nation, which had its beginning in the commitment to safeguard and promote the inalienable right to “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” for all, without boundary, is more and more setting arbitrary limits to her commitment (cf. The Declaration of Independence: Action of Second Continental Congress, 4 July 1776, in The Constitution of the United States with the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2002, p. 81). Those in power now determine who will or will not be accorded the legal protection of the most fundamental right to life. First the legal protection of the right to life is denied to the unborn and, then, to those whose lives have become burdened by advanced years, special needs or serious illness, or whose lives are

somehow judged to be unprofitable or unworthy.

7. What is more, those in power propose to force physicians and other healthcare professionals, in other words, those with a particular responsibility to protect and foster human life, to participate, contrary to what their conscience requires, in the destruction of unborn human lives, from the first or embryonic stage of development to the moment of birth. Our laws may soon force those who have dedicated themselves to the care of the sick and the promotion of good health to give up their noble life work, in order to be true to the most sacred dictate of their consciences. What is more, if our nation continues down the path it has taken, healthcare institutions operating in accord with the natural moral law, which teaches us that innocent human life is to be protected and fostered at all times and that it is always and everywhere evil to destroy an innocent human life, will be forced to close their doors.

8. At the same time, the fundamental society, that is, the family, upon which the life of our nation is founded and depends, is under attack by legislation which redefines marriage to include a relationship between two persons of the same sex and permits them to adopt children. In the same line, it is proposed to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act. At the root of the confusion and error about marriage is the contraceptive mentality – which would have us believe that the inherently procreative nature of the conjugal union can, in practice, be mechanically or chemically eliminated, while the marital act remains unitive. It cannot be so. With unparalleled arrogance, our nation is choosing to renounce its foundation upon the faithful, indissoluble, and inherently procreative love of a man and a woman in marriage, and, in violation of what nature itself teaches us, to replace it with a so-called marital relationship, according to the definition of those who exercise the greatest power in our society.

9. The path of violation of the most fundamental human rights and of the integrity of marriage and the family, which our nation is traveling, is not accidental. It is part of the program set forth by those whom we have freely chosen to lead our nation. The part of the program in question was not unknown to us; it was announced to us beforehand and a majority of our fellow citizens, including a majority of our fellow Catholics, chose the leadership which is now implementing it with determination. For example, I refer to our President's declared support of the Freedom of Choice Act, which would make illegal any legislation restricting procured abortion; his repeal of the Mexico City Policy, permitting U.S. funding of procured abortion in other nations, together with the grant of fifty million dollars to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities which, for example, supported the Republic of China's policy of one child per family by means of government-dictated sterilization and abortion; his proposal to rescind the regulations appended to the federal Conscience Clause, which assure that, not only physicians,

but also all health-care workers may refuse to provide services, information or counsel to patients regarding medications and procedures which are contrary to their conscience; his removal of limitations on federal funding of embryonic-stem-cell research, involving the wholesale destruction of human life at the embryonic stage of development; and his choice of the members of his administration, who are remarkable for the number of major officials, including several Catholics, who favor the denial of the right to life to the unborn and the violation of the integrity of marriage and the family. These are only some examples of a consistent pattern of decisions by the leadership of our nation which is taking our nation down a path which denies the fundamental right to life to the innocent and defenseless unborn and violates the fundamental integrity of the marital union and the family.

10. As Catholics, we cannot fail to note, with the greatest sadness, the number of our fellow Catholics, elected or appointed by our President to public office, who cooperate fully in the advancement of a national agenda which is anti-life and anti-family. Most recently, the appointment of a Catholic as Secretary of Health and Human Services, who has openly and persistently cooperated with the industry of procured abortion in our nation, is necessarily a source of the deepest embarrassment to Catholics and a painful reminder of the most serious responsibility of Catholics to uphold the natural moral law, which is the irreplaceable foundation of just relationships among the citizens of our nation. It grieves me to say that the support of anti-life legislation by Catholics in public office is so common that those who are not Catholic have justifiably questioned whether the Church's teaching regarding the inviolable dignity of innocent human life is firm and unchanging. It gives the impression that the Church herself can change the law which God has written on every human heart from the beginning of time and has declared in the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue: Thou shalt not kill.

11. As is clear, the anti-life and anti-family path down which our nation is being led has repercussions for many other peoples who rely upon the United States for aid or who are influenced by the international policies upon which our nation insists. The interest of so many nations in our recent presidential election is a clear sign of the world leadership which our national leadership exercises. What those who were so enthused about the strong message of change and hope in the United States, delivered during the last election campaign, are now discovering is a consistent implementation of policies and programs which confirm and advance the culture of death, which can only finally leave our world without the great hope, described by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI in these words:

Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who

encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us.

His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is truly life (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, On Christian Hope, 30 November 2007, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* no. 31).

The change which brings hope can only be the renewal of our nation in the divine love which respects the inviolable dignity of every human life, from the moment of its inception to the moment of natural death, and which creates and gives growth to new human life through the love of man and woman in marriage. Any hope which is incoherent with the great hope is truly illusory and can never bring forth justice and its fruit, peace, for our nation and world.

Addressing the Crisis

12. How can we as Catholics address effectively the critical situation of our nation in what pertains to the fundamental right to life and the integrity of the family? What does the virtue of patriotism, together with all of the virtues inspired by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, require of us for the common good, for the good of the whole nation? First and foremost, it demands what we are doing this morning, that is, prayer, and the serious reflection which arises from our communion with God in prayer.

13. When Our Lord descended from the Mount of the Transfiguration, he found that his disciples had tried, without success, to help a boy afflicted by an unclean spirit. Our Lord then cast out the unclean spirit, prompting his disciples, when they were alone with Him, to ask why they had been unable to free the boy from his affliction. Our Lord responded with these words: This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting (Mk 9:29). Our Lord reminded them that the good which they wished to accomplish in the face of great evil could only be attained through prayer and fasting. In other words, evil cannot be overcome by our own forces alone, but by the grace of God which inspires and strengthens our thoughts and actions. It is Christ alone who has accomplished the victory over sin and its most evil fruit, eternal death, and it is Christ alone, in the Church, who continues to bring forth

the fruits of His victory in our lives and in our world.

14. In the battle for the protection of the right to life and for the safeguarding of the integrity of marriage and the family in our nation, we are easily tempted to give way to discouragement. And it would be right to do so, if the outcome of the battle depended upon us alone. But it does not. Christ is with us always in the Church and, in a particular way, in the struggle to restore the respect for the right to life of all of our brothers and sisters, especially those who are helpless and who have the first title to our care, and to safeguard the integrity of marriage and the family. Christ Who is the Gospel of Life, encountered in prayer and through the Sacraments, will give us the strength to announce His word of life and to act upon His word of life, on behalf of all in our nation, especially those who depend upon us to care for them and protect their God-given rights.

15. If we are serious about our patriotic duty, then we must pray everyday for our leaders, especially our President, and our nation. We should also practice more fervently our fasting and abstinence for the conversion of our lives and the transformation of our society. If we want to act for the common good, the good of all, in our nation, then we will seek to convert our lives each day to Christ, especially through the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Christ desires to announce the Gospel of Life and bring about its saving effects in our nation by the complete conversion of our lives to Him for the sake of all our brothers and sisters, without boundary, and for the sake of the preservation of the sanctuary of human life, marriage and the family.

16. At various times of great crisis in our nation and in the world, the Holy Father and our Bishops have called upon all Catholics to offer special prayers for the nation and for the world. I recall so well, from my youth, the Leonine Prayers offered at the conclusion of every Mass to address the growing threat of atheistic materialism in our world. Remember, too, how Pope Saint Pius V, in 1571, called upon the whole Church to pray, especially through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when the Christian world was under attack by the Turks. After the victory of the Battle of Lepanto, on October 7, 1571, he established October 7th as an annual feast in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary and introduced the title of Mary Help of Christians into the Litany of Loreto. In the present crisis, praying daily the Rosary for our nation and invoking daily the intercession of Mary Help of Christians will be powerful forces for the victory of life and love.

17. At every Mass, we should offer special prayers for our nation and her leaders, in order that the culture of death may be overcome and a civilization of love may be steadfastly advanced. All Catholics throughout the nation should take part in Eucharistic adoration and in the praying of the Rosary for the restoration of the respect for

human life and for the safeguarding of the integrity of the family. In our prayers, we should seek, above all, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her title of the Immaculate Conception. Mary Immaculate is the patroness of our nation. In a most wonderful way, she appeared, on our continent, in what is present-day Mexico City, in 1531, as the Immaculate Mother of God, in order to manifest the all-merciful love of God toward His children of America. Through her example and intercession, the Native Americans and Europeans, who were on the brink of a most deadly conflict, were brought together to form one people under her maternal care, and the widespread practice of human sacrifice among the native people was brought to an end. In our time, in many parishes and dioceses there are campaigns of prayer for our nation and her leaders. May these powerful spiritual works continue and prosper, so that, through prayer and fasting, the grave evils of contraception, procured abortion, euthanasia, the experimentation on embryonic human life, and so-called same-sex marriage may be overcome in our nation.

18. Connected with our prayer must be the thoughtful and faithful reflection upon the Church's teaching on the respect for all human life and the integrity of the family. In our homes, in our Catholic schools and universities, in parish study groups, and in everyday conversations and discussions with our neighbors, we are called to give an uncompromising witness to the Gospel of Life. Parents, parish priests and institutions of Catholic education must be aware of the constant anti-life and anti-family messages which constantly bombard us and our young people. One has only to think, for example, of the corruption of the goodness of our youth by the multi-million dollar industry of pornography, especially on the Internet. Our reflection as individuals and groups must open our eyes to the gravity of the situation in our nation, lest we fail to take responsibility for the widespread attacks on human life and the family. Our reflection must help us all and, in a particular way, our young people to see the godless secularism and relativism which underlie and justify our nation's anti-life and anti-family programs, policies and laws.

19. Our encounter with the world must be clear and uncompromising. Parents must reflect in their daily living the lifelong and rich fruit of the Gospel of Life, which they are called to teach to their children. Catholic educational institutions must devote themselves ever more strenuously to the study of the truths of the faith, addressing them to the moral challenges of our time. In a culture marked by widespread and grave confusion and error about the most fundamental teachings of the moral law, our Catholic schools and universities must be beacons of truth and right conduct. Clearly, the same is true of our Catholic charitable, missionary and healthcare institutions. There can be no place in them for teaching or activities which offend the moral law. Dialogue and respect for differences

are not promoted by the compromise and even violation of the natural moral law. The profound granting of an honorary doctorate at Notre Dame University to our President who is as aggressively advancing an anti-life and anti-family agenda is a source of the gravest scandal. Catholic institutions cannot offer any platform to, let alone honor, those who teach and act publicly against the moral law. In a culture which embraces an agenda of death, Catholics and Catholic institutions are necessarily counter-cultural. If we as individuals or our Catholic institutions are not willing to accept the burdens and the suffering necessarily involved in calling our culture to reform, then we are not worthy of the name Catholic.

Catholics and Public Life

20. Our prayer and conversion of life, and the serious reflection upon and study of the truths of the moral life, both as individuals and in our Catholic institutions, require that we accept our responsibility as citizens to work tirelessly to change unjust programs, policies and laws. In a nation set so firmly on a path of violation of the most fundamental moral norms, Catholics and others who adhere to the natural moral law are pressured to think that their religious commitment to the moral law as the way of seeking the good of all is a merely confessional matter which cannot have any application in public life. Apparently, a number of Catholics in public life have been so convinced. How often do we hear Catholic legislators who vote in favor of anti-life and anti-family legislation claim that they are personally opposed to what the legislation protects and fosters, but that they as public officials may not allow religious beliefs to affect their support of such legislation? How often do we hear fellow Catholics supporting candidates for office, who are anti-life and anti-family, because of political-party loyalties or for reasons of other policies and programs supported by the candidate, which they deem to be good? How often is such thinking justified by the claim that religious faith is a purely private matter and has no place in the public forum? On the contrary, the common good depends upon the active engagement of religious faith in the public forum.

21. Addressing the role of the Church in the political order, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us:

It must not be forgotten that, when Churches or ecclesial communities intervene in public debate, expressing reservations or recalling various principles, this does not constitute a form of intolerance or interference, since such interventions are aimed solely at enlightening consciences, enabling them to act freely and responsibly, according to the true demands of justice, even when this should conflict with situations of power and personal interest (Pope Benedict XVI, *Ad Congressum a Popolari Europae Factione proventum, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 [2006], 344)."

In his Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, our Holy Father reminded us of the great gift of our faith which enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, On Christian Love, 25 December 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 [2006], 239, no. 28). When the Church addresses her social teaching to issues of the common good, she has no intention of giving the Church power over the State or to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith (*Deus caritas est*, no. 28). Her aim, which is our aim as patriotic Catholics, is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just (*Deus caritas est*, no. 28). In addressing the critical issues of our nation, the Church and we, as her faithful sons and daughters, intervene on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being (*Deus caritas est*, no. 28).

22. Our uncompromising commitment to protect the inviolable dignity of innocent human life and to safeguard the integrity of marriage and the family are not based on peculiar confessional beliefs or practices but on the natural moral law, written on every heart and, therefore, a fundamental part of the Church's moral teaching. At the same time, what is always and everywhere evil cannot be called good for the sake of accomplishing some other good end. All of us must be concerned about a wide range of goods which are important to the life of our nation, but the concern for those goods can never justify the betrayal of the fundamental goods of life itself and the family. We must take care to uproot from our moral thinking any form of relativism, consequentialism and proportionalism, which would lead us into the error of thinking that it is sometimes right to do what is always and everywhere evil.

23. An important part of our moral reflection must include a clear understanding of the principles regarding cooperation in evil, especially by the act of voting. Too often, in our time, our inability to accomplish all that we should for the sake of the defense of the right to life and of the protection of the integrity of the family is used to justify the direct choice of a political leader who espouses a position or positions in violation of the natural moral law. The Servant of God Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, addresses at length the question of cooperation in evil which violates the dignity of innocent human life. He offers as an example the case of a legislator who has the possibility of voting for a law which would restrict the evil of procured abortion, even though it would not eradicate it completely. He concludes that the legislator could vote for the legislation, while his own opposition to procured abortion remains clear, for his vote does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects (Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter

Evangelium vitae, On the Good and Inviolability of Human Life, 25 March 1995, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 [1995], 487, no. 73). In an analogous manner, as voters, we are often faced with a choice among candidates who do not fully oppose unjust laws. In such a case, we must choose the candidate who will most limit the evil effects of unjust laws. But, there is no element of the common good, no morally good practice, which a candidate may promote and to which a voter may be dedicated, which could justify voting for a candidate who also endorses and supports the deliberate killing of the unborn, euthanasia or the recognition of a same-sex relationship as a legal marriage. The respect for the inviolable dignity of innocent human life and for the integrity of marriage and the family are so fundamental to the common good that they cannot be subordinated to any other cause, no matter how good it may be.

24. In the present situation of our nation, a serious question has arisen about the moral obligation of Catholics to work for the overturning of the Supreme Court decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. There are those who would tell us that such work is futile and, therefore, is to be abandoned, so that we can devote ourselves to help prevent individuals from choosing abortion. As Catholics, we can never cease to work for the correction of gravely unjust laws. Law is a fundamental expression of our culture and implicitly teaches citizens what is morally acceptable. Our efforts to assist those who are tempted to do what is always and everywhere wrong or are suffering from the effects of having committed a gravely immoral act, which are essential expressions of the charity which unites us as citizens of the nation, ultimately make little sense, if we remain idle regarding unjust laws and decisions of the courts regarding the same intrinsic evils. We are never justified in abandoning the work of changing legislation and of reversing decisions of the courts which are anti-life and anti-family.

Conclusion

25. As we gather this morning to pray for our nation, let us draw courage and strength from the glorious pierced Heart of Our Lord Jesus. Let us not give way to discouragement in our exercise of patriotism but rather be confident of the essential contribution which our Catholic faith makes to the life of our nation.

26. May the courage and strength which comes to us from the Sacred Heart of Jesus enlighten our minds to see more clearly the gravity of the situation of our nation and inflame our hearts to do our part to transform the life of our nation, in accord with the natural moral law, that is, with what is just and serves the good of all. Let us draw courage and strength from the Sacred Heart of Jesus through prayer and the Sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. May the

courage and strength of Christ guide our reflection on the state of our nation and lead us to that just action, taught to us by our faith, which serves the good of all.

27. Invoking the intercession of Mary Immaculate, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America, let us pray today and everyday that we as Catholics, true to our faith and, therefore, patriotically devoted to our nation, may promote respect for all human life, safeguard the sanctity of marriage and the family, and, thereby, foster the good of all in the nation and in the world.

Thank you. God bless you.