

A Good Friday Message from Bishop Provost

"We ourselves are proclaiming this good news to you." Acts 13:32

My dear People of God,

Every time we celebrate the mysteries of our faith and particularly at Easter, the priest has the privilege of proclaiming once again the message of the apostles. Like St. Paul, he can stand before the congregation and proclaim, "We ourselves are proclaiming this good news to you" (Acts 13:32). And what is that "good news", an expression from which we get "Gospel" in English? "That what God promised our ancestors he has brought to fulfillment for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (Acts 13:32-33). It was the same "good news" preached by St. Peter at "Solomon's Portico," when he proclaimed, "The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15).

The "good news" is the mystery of Jesus' life-giving passion, death, and Resurrection. This is the Pascal Mystery. This is the mystery of God who loves us so much, that while we were still sinners, He gave us His only Son to suffer, die, and rise from the dead so that proclaiming this mystery we might have hope and sharing in this mystery we might have eternal life.

There is in fact no death without suffering and no resurrection without death. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught the interconnectedness of the three. He said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24). Every Christian is invited to this mystery. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). If Christianity is the imitation of Christ, then the Christian must live this mystery.

The Christian must begin where the mystery begins, with suffering. Human suffering can take many different forms. Usually we find suffering in illness and in loneliness and alienation. I think also that suffering comes from three crises that face humanity.

When we hear "crisis" spoken of today, people usually mean the economy. Many have lost jobs. Others have lost much, if not most, of their savings. Many in our area suffered through the loss of property during the last hurricanes. This is a material crisis, and it causes real suffering.

There is yet another "crisis." This one is moral. This crisis manifests itself in the break-up of families, rising rates of drug addiction, promiscuity, and a disregard for human life, beginning with the life of the unborn. This moral crisis also causes serious suffering at a different level.

I think there is a third "crisis." This one is cultural. The cultural crisis is intertwined with the other two, the economic and moral, to the extent that they all proceed from two major movements in our modern world: secularism and materialism. When we place our trust in "mammon" and forget God as the source of all good, then we suffer even more. This cultural crisis is seen most especially in the fundamental malaise of society. We mistake opinion for truth. We are unable to define what is objectively good. And we destroy beauty.

How do we respond to these crises and suffering in particular? The answer is rooted in the very "good news" proclaimed by the Gospels. Simply, we respond with the Truth. There is no Resurrection without a dying to self. That is the Truth, and Jesus taught and lived it. Any crisis can be an invitation to suffering, a suffering that transforms. Whatever suffering can be redemptive, if we embrace it with faith.

The Christian must not only preach the "good news." The Christian must live the "good news." The Christian must live the mystery of Christ's passion, death and Resurrection. In this way the Christian witnesses to the Truth. As St. Paul so beautifully said — "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1) — then the Christian must imitate Christ in every respect. In doing so, the Christian witnesses to the world the reason for hope (1 Peter 3:15).

I recall the beautiful words spoken by Pope Benedict XVI when he visited our country a year ago this next week. "Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free" (Rally for Young People and Seminarians, Yonkers, New York, April 19, 2008).

Happy Easter! In whatever crisis you suffer, live the Truth. Witness to others the reason for your hope.

God love you!


+Glen John Provost
Bishop of Lake Charles

E-mail campaign to supplement postcard missives to Congress

LAKE CHARLES - More than 45,000 postcards have been mailed by concerned Catholics of the Diocese of Lake Charles to U.S. Senators and Representatives, according to Kathy Owen, director of the Office of Pro Life for the Diocese. The postcards are part of a nationwide campaign espoused by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to bring the feelings of the people regarding the damage that can come about by the passing of the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) to members of Congress.

Bishop Glen John Provost has urged the faithful of Southwest Louisiana to take part in this program saying, "The threat is serious. I firmly believe that failure to voice an objection and concern would be morally delinquent. I ask also for your prayers in support of life."

In the Diocese of Lake Charles, as of April 2, a total 45,204 postcards have been sent to Sen. Mary Landrieu and Sen. David Vitter, along with Louisiana Representatives Charles Boustany, John

Fleming, and Rodney Alexander.

Now the Bishops are urging people to continue to let their Senators and Representatives know their feelings about FOCA as well as other pro-life issues by sending e-mails to the Congress opposing FOCA or any similar measure as well as to retain existing laws against funding and promotion of abortion. To send your own e-mail message to your Senators and Representatives go to <http://www.usccb.org/postcard/>.

While tens of millions of cards have been distributed in parishes, schools, and civic organizations across America, the e-mail campaign will give even more citizens the chance to participate.

The Bishops also urge the importance of the retention of those laws in the various appropriations bills and to guard against the erosion of current pro-life measures and to keep abortion from becoming a federal entitlement.

The offices of the Diocese of Lake Charles will be closed today, Good Friday and Easter Monday, April 13. They will reopen on Tuesday, April 14, at 8:30 a.m.

Did you know...

The three large and intricately carved Gothic marble altars were installed in the Cathedral in 1923 by Lake Charles marble craftsman Floyd Solari. They had previously graced the Cathedral in Salt Lake City, Utah and came to Lake Charles through the Zimmerman Family, who told Msgr. Hubert Cramers about them. They had been stored in the basement of the Cathedral after being dismantled when new altars were installed during a remodeling. They were crated up and arrived in Lake Charles via freight train in two boxcars. No blueprint or pattern or photograph was available to show Solari how the pieces fit together and it took him a year to bring off the herculean task, which was aided by a local building contractor who took care of the heavy lifting of the pieces. The central altar is dominated by a statue of the Blessed Virgin under the title of Immaculate Conception. The two side altars feature the Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John.

Five parishes were specially honored as part of the Millennium 2000 celebration because they embraced the entire area of what is now the Diocese of Lake Charles. Do you know which parishes they were? Find out in our next Catholic Calendar.



Joel Guinn



Adam Berken



Maggie King

Joel Guinn named Louisiana non-public student of the year

LAKE CHARLES - Joel Guinn, a student at Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School in Jennings, has been named a finalist for the statewide Eighth Grade Student of the Year Competition. He is the eighth grade representative of non-public schools in the state. The state competition is scheduled for April 15 in Baton Rouge. Guinn qualified for the regional level when he was chosen the Southwest Louisiana District Eighth Grade Student of the Year.

Other SW Louisiana District Students of the Year

were Magdalena "Maggie" King, 12th grade, St. Louis Catholic High School and Adam Berken, fifth grade, Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School.

Students representing their schools at the district competition were, fifth grade, Claire Heinen, Our Lady's School; Shayla Stevens, Sacred Heart/Saint Katharine Drexel Catholic School; Cole Johnson, St. Theodore's Holy Family Catholic School; Ryan Palermo, Immaculate Conception Cathedral Catholic School; Matthew Daigle, St. Mar-

garet of Scotland Catholic School; and Kaitlyn Fontenot, Bethel Christian School.

Eighth grade representatives included Julie Falgout, St. Margaret; Paula Dejean, Sacred Heart/St. Katharine Drexel; Meghan Prieto, Our Lady's School; Kimberly Soileau, St. Theodore's Holy Family; Sarah France, Immaculate Conception Cathedral Catholic School; and Jordan Bee, Bethel Christian School. The other twelfth grade representative was Andrew Wall of Bethel Christian School.

OLI Catholic School celebrates 50 years

JENNINGS - Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School will close out its 50th year anniversary celebration at its Fantastic Fifty Fun Day on Saturday, April 25. Gates open at 10 a.m.

Memorabilia, 8th grade graduation pictures, photo albums and more will be displayed. Morning and afternoon guided tours of the school will be available. Live music and student performances will also be on tap.

For more information contact Stacy Myers at 824-1743 or smyers@olischool.org.

Stem Cell Research and the Search for Truth

BY REVEREND DEREK S. COVERT
Secretary Adjutant to Bishop Provost

A flurry of statements has recently arisen regarding the policy changes on the funding of embryonic stem cell research. President Obama made the declaration that "science - not political ideology - would guide his administration." At the same time it is reported that the majority of Americans want this type of research; however, it would be more correct to say that the majority of Americans desire cures for diseases which are apparently irreversible, and likewise, cures for debilitating injuries.

If Americans are led to believe that the use of embryonic stem cells is the "only" way to heal certain conditions, then these same Americans will consider its advancement. However, if there is an alternative, most would welcome the alternative wholeheartedly. Catholics and citizens of these United States must stop and ask a few important questions. First, why is the debate significant and what is at stake? Second, what are the facts about stem cell research? Third, how can moral research proceed?

The fundamental issue in the debate surrounding embryonic stem cell research concerns the sacredness of life. The notion that life is not only sacred but worthy of protection from the moment of conception to natural death is not necessarily a religious nor a political ideology; rather, it is a human concern. There have been numerous testimonies from people supporting embryonic stem cell research who suffer from debilitating diseases and injuries. Their stories are emotional and rightly elicit an empathetic response. What has not been reported, however, are the stories of people who, although they may have irreversible diseases, are not in support of technological advances that would require sacrificing the life of another

human being. The late Pope John Paul II was a living witness as he suffered as much as anyone from Parkinson's Disease, one of the diseases which researchers claim would be cured by embryonic stem cells. Yet he embraced his suffering rather than demanding immoral medical advances in the desire to lessen his suffering.

The central point of this debate needs to be clear in both our minds and our hearts so that confusion is not the result of rhetoric. The debate is not about "an ethical imperative to relieve suffering and promote healing." Alleviation of suffering has been the constant task for the Catholic Church, who has committed herself from the beginning to relieve suffering and to visit the sick (Matthew 25:36). In so doing, however, the Church has never lost sight of the ethical truth that the end does not justify the means (Romans 3:8). When this foundational truth is ignored, what happens are the atrocities of the 20th century like the Tuskegee and Nazi experiments when human life was used to further medical advances and science. Human life was considered neither sacred nor equal, and the dignity of the human person was obscured by political and social ideologies. That this potential exists is the motivating concern for which the Church continues to take a stand, educating and reminding about the importance of life issues, whether the issues are regarding poverty, abortion or stem cell research.

Much of the conversation regarding stem cell research has surrounded the controversial use of embryonic cells. However, current stem cell research also includes the investigation of what are called adult stem cells. What is the difference?

With Embryonic Stem Cell Research, human life is being taken at its earliest stage, since this research necessarily requires the

destruction of the embryo. Science reveals that human life begins at conception with one cell and develops into a complex, multi-cellular organism. When the zygote is formed after the fusion of the gametes (sex cells), it possesses the properties and functions of a new human organism; therefore, it is not merely another human cell, e.g. a skin cell. It is human life! The single cell zygote develops into the embryo and the fetus, the infant, the child, the adolescent, and finally, the adult man and woman. This is universally accepted.

Adult Stem Cell Research, in contrast, uses mature cells from a number of sources, such as umbilical cord blood or skin cells. Research with adult stem cells does not require the destruction of human life; hence, it is both ethically moral and scientifically sound. The Catholic Church supports this research wholeheartedly. At this point in the scientific research, embryonic stem cells promise the potential of being used in medicine, but to date this remains theoretical. "After nearly ten years of research, there are no approved treatments or human trials using embryonic stem cells." On the other hand, Adult Stem Cells are already routinely used in medical therapies. "[These] treatments have been successfully used for many years to treat leukemia and related bone/blood cancers through bone marrow transplants."

In 1998, Dr. James Thomson from the University of Wisconsin-Madison derived the first embryonic stem cell line. Dr. Thomson said in an interview that he had ethical concerns about embryonic research from the outset, even though he knew that such research offered insights into human development and the potential for powerful new treatments for disease.

"If human embryonic stem cell research does not make you at least a little bit uncomfortable," said Dr. Thomson, "you have not

thought about it enough." Dr. Thomson continued, "Now with the new technique, which involves adding just four genes to ordinary adult skin cells, it will not be long before the stem cell wars are a distant memory." More work remains, but Dr. Thomson is confident that the path ahead is clear. "Isn't it great to start a field and then to end it," he said." In November 2007, a major development occurred when scientists, using gene manipulation, were able to return adult stem cells to an embryonic like state. These cells are called "induced pluripotent stem cells" (iPS). Although further research is required, the discovery essentially eliminates the necessity of using embryonic stem cells.

The notion that embryonic stem cells are the best avenue for preventing people from suffering is false and places us in the moral quandary in which we currently find ourselves. Sound science, and not political ideology, clearly shows that Adult Stem Cell research is not controversial and provides more than "promises;" it offers solid scientific research to support its viability. If we are patient, the proper moral solution will always present itself because the end does not justify the means. Violence only begets violence. Jesus always challenged those he forgave to, "go and do not sin again" (John 8:11). We should not believe ourselves above this moral imperative to cooperate with right reason and faith.

The Church is not opposed to science but rather calls for a principled framework where science and the dignity of the human person do not cancel one another out. Ethics and science can work together. May we be in solidarity with the many who suffer daily from disease and physical injuries, and may we continue to strive to provide moral solutions to alleviate suffering. (EDITOR'S NOTE: You can read expanded version of this story at lcdiocese.org.)