

REFLECTIONS ON THE “MARCH FOR LIFE”

by His Grace, Bishop MICHAEL

For several years now, I have participated in the annual “March for Life” in our nation’s capital. As a parish priest, as Dean of St. Tikhon’s Seminary, and now as a Bishop, I have always felt a duty to witness to the Church’s position on life beginning at conception, to stand up in defense of the rights of the pre-born who cannot speak for themselves, and to protest the decision of the Supreme Court, *Roe v. Wade*, that legalized abortion in the United States.

One might ask what good such a March does when it seems to have had little effect in changing the famed 1973 decision of the Court. Certainly right now neither the President nor the Congress nor the justices of the Supreme Court are proposing the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. But, in fact, the March has made a significant difference. There are fewer abortions performed now than in years past. More Americans than ever agree that abortions should be limited – many believe that abortion should be legalized only in cases of incest and rape; still more Americans would limit abortions at least to the first trimester of pregnancy.

But the most important accomplishment of the March for Life is that it is demonstrating very clearly that the hearts and minds of young people in this country are being reached by the Pro-Life Movement. Every year of the past decade, more and more marchers are young people – scores of students from St. Vladimir’s and St. Tikhon’s Seminaries and hundreds of Catholic seminarians from across the land ... and thousands of high school students under the banner of “Orthodox Christians for Life” and the banners from Catholic schools, parishes and dioceses from throughout the country ... and even many marchers from Evangelical backgrounds.

These young people have accepted the teaching of the Church from its inception: that life begins at conception and that it is God Who gives life in the womb and takes life to Himself at the tomb. They understand that “Choice” means choosing life for a child, a human person in the womb for nine months ... but a human person nonetheless. They know that their Savior came into this world from the womb of the Theotokos ... where He spent a full nine months ... before He was born in the flesh on the Feast of the Nativity. They are marching for the unalienable “right to life” of the pre-born who have no voice of their own. And they do so with faith and love and zeal. It touches my heart deeply to know that the future of this land rests in them.

Every year, on the evening before the March, Roman Catholics gather in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for a Mass – scores of bishops, hundreds of priests, and thousands of faithful. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we Orthodox could gather in St. Sophia Cathedral in Washington, DC, the night before each March, for an Akathist – all 56 of the Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States, hundreds of clergy, and faithful filling the cathedral to capacity – and then all of us come to the March and stand up for the pre-born? Wouldn’t that confirm the faith and the love and the zeal of our young people? Wouldn’t that speak volumes to Capitol Hill? Wouldn’t it be an incredible witness to the Pro-Life Movement and to Orthodoxy in America?

Until that happens, we will continue to pray ... and to march on.