

“Jesus, show me what I can do today to help protect the dignity of the unborn.”

A powerful reflection on the readings of Wednesday January 22nd 2020 (2nd Week in Ordinary Time)

1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51

Psalm 144:1-2, 9-10

Mark 3:1-6

Stretch out your hand. (Mark 3:5)

Instead of avoiding the religious leaders’ scrutiny, Jesus pushed forward. He invited the man with the disability to join him in the front of the synagogue and asked his detractors a pointed question: “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil?” (Mark 3:4). Understanding what he was referring to, they remained silent. Their hardheartedness disturbed Jesus, for it had condemned this man to continued suffering. As far as he was concerned, their failure to act amounted to evil-doing.

Today, as we remember the United States Supreme Court’s infamous Roe v. Wade decision, which made legalized abortion possible in the United States, this Gospel reading is especially challenging. It warns us against failing to act. To disregard the vulnerability of the unborn, to turn a deaf ear to the fears and concerns of their parents can be like passing by a wounded traveler on the other side of the road (Luke 10:29-37). This story urges us to step out in faith instead.

“But what difference could I possibly make? Abortion is such a polarizing issue. How can I turn the tide?”

Jesus told the man, “Stretch out your hand” (Mark 3:5). But the man’s hand was useless. He couldn’t do what Jesus commanded, but he obeyed anyway. And in that obedience, he found healing.

Today Jesus says to us, “Stretch out your hand.” Stretch out your hand in prayer, asking for a change of heart among those who advocate for abortion. Stretch out your hand in service by offering to help a single mom trying to make ends meet, by giving prayerful witness in front of an abortion clinic, or by supporting your parish’s respect-life group. Of course your resources are inadequate, but God always makes possible what he commands. If salvation can come from a baby in a manger, don’t ever discount how much of a difference you can make.

As we pray for the unborn today, let’s remember today’s first reading. David was able to rescue his people with only a few stones and deep faith. In a similar way, we can triumph over fear, cynicism, and despair by stretching out our hands and witnessing to the preciousness of life.

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