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Addresses

Defend life in all its stages

January 20-21, 2001
Colorado

This letter was read from the altar at Masses on the weekend of Jan. 20-21, 2001, in commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *The Gospel of Life*, encouraged women of the world with the following words: "You are called to bear witness to genuine love ... learn and teach others that human relations are authentic [only] if they are open to accepting the other person [who should be] recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person, and not from considerations such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health."

The Holy Father may have offered these thoughts to women, but he meant them for all of us who follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The sacredness of the human person undergirds all of our rights as a free people. Yet today in our country that sacredness faces a growing indifference and hostility.

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This weekend I ask you to reflect prayerfully on a continuing national tragedy which began on January 22, 1973. On that date, the United States Supreme Court ruled that unborn children no longer qualify as persons, and therefore require no protection under the law. In the years since *Roe v. Wade*, some 45 million unborn children have paid for this legalized killing with their lives.

I am very keenly aware of the pressures faced by women who find themselves in a crisis pregnancy. I want to assure them that the Church is eager to listen and to help them through their difficult time. I urge men to accept their responsibilities as fathers and to provide the needed support to help mothers bring their children to term. I ask parents, whose teen-age daughters may be pregnant, to respond with love instead of recrimination, and to encourage adoption rather than abortion.

Abortion has brutally and cynically pitted a mother's rights against the rights of her unborn child. As a result, we live in a culture that increasingly puts all children at risk, and damages the lives of millions of adults. We know from our own direct counseling here in the Archdiocese of Denver that many, many post-abortive mothers and fathers suffer a sense of loss throughout their lives. I ask you to reach out to those who have suffered from an abortion and to extend God's mercy and love to them.

Our country can still restore itself as a "culture of life" — but only if we begin again to respect the sacredness of every human life, from conception to natural death. As we reflect on the 28th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, I urge you to live the "Gospel of life" ardently in your own families, and to do everything in your power, beginning with prayer, to defend life in all its stages.