

## Mary and Abortion

Laventille Devotions Sunday 12 Sept. 2004

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Your Grace, Archbishop Edward Gilbert, Bishop Mendes, brothers and sisters in Christ, I am sure that, like me, you have some favourite hymns to Mary that you have always enjoyed singing. Since I was a child I always enjoyed singing: “Immaculate Mary, Our hearts are on fire, Thy title so wondrous fills all our desire. Ave, Ave, Ave Maria...”

It was only as I grew up and reflected, when saying the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on all the various titles that Mary has, that I realized why my heart should be on fire.

Mary, an unmarried young girl who was betrothed to Joseph, in accordance with Jewish law, faced what may be seen in certain quarters as an “unplanned pregnancy”. She and Joseph had both vowed to be chaste and pure and yet here was Angel Gabriel suddenly appearing to Mary telling her that she was going to have a child. Her response is: *Let it be done to me according to your word*. As Fr Pavone of Priests for Life, USA, says: “She freely chooses to accept the Child, and in doing so, acknowledges the primacy of the *word*. In other words, the *truth* of God's Word exists before her own choosing. She submits to a word, a truth, she did not create.”

Mary said “Yes” to being the Mother of Jesus who came to die for our sins – yours and mine – so that we may have life and have it more abundantly (Annunciation: Lk.1:26-38). Shouldn't our hearts be on fire for that?

There has always been a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother within the Catholic element of the pro-life movement. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness of the Unborn. Her image was left on the tilma of a young Mexican boy, Juan Diego. In the image Our Lady is pregnant with Jesus. All around the world there are wonderful images of Mary as a mother, lovingly holding her infant son, Jesus. What wonderful symbols of motherhood.

Mary continues to play a large part in God's plan for us. That is why today I want us to lift up our voices to her to intercede with her Son for us so that we will have the courage and strength to fight the battle that is being waged not only in T&T but around the world to save our unborn children from the evils of abortion.

The Church's opposition to abortion is based on the sanctity and dignity of human life from its conception. The defence of life at its most vulnerable moments is an essential condition of achieving the common good. As the UK Bishops said: “That common good is a social reality, which cannot be reduced to the sum total of individual wishes and interests, or to the greatest good of the greatest possible number.

This assault on human life in our time has become a crisis of culture, a crisis of love, a crisis of civilisation. In this crisis we cannot remain silent. Neutrality is not an option; silence is not a choice. If we don't speak out then we are building our future on sand.

I wish to state from the start that as Christians we should not be judgemental but should reach out to those who have had abortions and who may be hurting and need our love and prayers. In their hour of need, let us not judge them but embrace them as they seek healing and support.

Our concern should also be to strive to create conditions in our country and worldwide that will offer women and men real alternatives to abortion e.g. addressing poverty and social exclusion, employment, housing, sexual harassment, domestic violence, chastity, abstinence, promoting family life, developing awareness of institutions/organizations that are available to support pregnant girls/women who are experiencing difficulties etc.

Let us respond to the real needs of people and provide mothers/parents/families with the concrete medical, financial, psychological, and spiritual help they need rather than opening up the floodgates to legalized abortion. Authentic holiness makes us more aware of and responsive to the real needs of others. Around the world this is what Marian pro-life ministry is about.

In 1925, after many years of slavery and indentureship, our lawmakers in T&T introduced a law (Offences Against The Persons Act Ch 11:08, Sections 56 & 57) that sought to protect the life of our unborn children. This law makes abortion illegal in T&T. You may have read that there is a group called ASPIRE that is now working feverishly to decriminalize abortion in T&T and they are affiliated to and receive money from a wealthy American pro-choice group called 'Planned Parenthood'..

We should ask ourselves what has changed since 1925 that may urge us today to want to throw back God's gift of life in His face? Sadly, when we look around we can almost feel the culture of death that pervades our land and our world. In his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life* (1995), Pope John Paul II strongly urges us to do all that we can to move from this culture of death to a culture of life. He specifically mentions abortion as being part of the culture of death. He says that we need now more than ever to have the courage to look things in the eye and call things by their proper name. Abortion is evil. Indeed, the Catholic Church has always viewed abortion as a grave moral sin.

There is a book by a man called Jim Nelson Black entitled: "*When Nations Die*" in which he analyses the death of nations. He discusses 10 warning signs of a nation in crisis:

1. Lawlessness
2. Loss of Economic Discipline
3. Rising Bureaucracy
4. Decline of Education
5. Weakening of Cultural Foundations
6. Loss of Respect for Tradition

7. Increase in Materialism
8. Rise in Immorality
9. Decay of Religious Belief and
10. Devaluing of Human Life.

If we examine this list we will find that many of the warning signs to which I referred apply to us in T&T. Much, therefore, has changed since 1925 and in many ways we are in crisis. But that does not mean that we should roll over and die and allow human life to be further devalued in our blessed country. Most people in T&T are people of faith who deep down believe in the sanctity and dignity of human life. The Inter-Religious Organisation has stated quite categorically that its members do not support Abortion.

We as Christians need to stand up for life now!!! The time has come for all of us to let it be known that we are pro-life: for mothers/parents and for their unborn children! Mother Teresa said: “Abortion has portrayed the greatest of gifts – a child – as a competitor, an intrusion and an inconvenience.”

Our Lady wants us to arise, wake up and show that we are a people of life! We follow Jesus who does not rejoice in the destruction of the living. A zygote or foetus becomes a living human being from the moment of conception – each with his/her own DNA/genetic blueprint! Our Catechism tells us that we must protect life from the moment of conception until natural death. Our Catechism also tells us that abortion is the deliberate and direct killing by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth. The fifth Commandment clearly states: “Thou shall not kill”. Nothing could be clearer than that. When human life is considered cheap or easily expendable in one area, eventually nothing is held as sacred and all lives are in jeopardy.

My brothers and sisters, Arise! Be witnesses to life by speaking up e.g. writing to the media, to your MP, the PM, your Councillors and others making it clear that you stand for life and that you oppose any proposal to decriminalize abortion in T&T. Join the rest of the nation on the National Day for Prayer on Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>. The day commences with a Walk for Peace from Jean Pierre Complex and Fernandes Complex at 10.00 a.m. and ends with an Interfaith Service at the Savannah.

I also want to draw your attention to the Caribbean-wide conference that will take place from 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> November at the Crowne Plaza on the issue of Abortion. Human Life International, a USA-based group, will join us at the Conference. You should also sign the Petition being circulated by Lawyers for Jesus to let our politicians know that we oppose the legalisation of abortion in T&T. You can sign these at Emmanuel Community or at Living Water Community.

Let us be witnesses and voices for those who have no voice and pray that our nation may wake up to the threat that faces to us. At a recent seminar on abortion, a Doctor from Guyana warned us to be alert because he said that while people in Guyana were ‘asleep’, that is, they did not take the threat seriously, the law there was amended to legalise

abortion. Barbados and St Lucia have also legalised abortion but we in T&T will not open our doors to legal abortion.

ASPIRE says that they are “pro-choice” but as Christians we know that this concept is contrary to God’s plan. Freedom is never about the well being of the individual; it is always also a relational matter. Once the life of another is at stake, no one may responsibly choose to violate it. When freedom of choice is invoked to dominate the weak and defenceless and deny the basic rights of others we must raise our voices to reaffirm the demands of justice and love, lest we begin to lose our own human dignity. We cannot endorse choices which drastically and unjustly limit the choices of other human beings.

The most drastic way to deny choice to a person is to take his/her life. You won’t have the opportunity to ‘choose’ if someone takes away your right to live. So don’t be fooled by groups like ASPIRE - the abortion choice is not a reproductive choice. It is a choice of whether or not to kill the young, already ‘reproduced’ human being.

Each unborn child has a right to life. Indeed, the right to life, enshrined in the Constitution, the highest law of our land, applies both to a pregnant mother and her unborn child.

As Fr Pavone says: “At the heart of the “pro-choice” mentality is the idea that *we create our own truth*. This mentality holds that the value of the unborn child, and that child’s very right to exist, *depend upon* the choice of the mother. In the pro-life mentality, on the other hand, the *choice* of the mother must *respect the truth of the inherent value of the child*, which does not in any way flow from or depend upon us... All the importance of Mary flows from her Son, and worship of the Son naturally leads to honoring the Mother. Right from this fundamental point, Marian devotion teaches us something about our pro-life commitment. *Mother and child belong together*.

“The difference between the pro-abortion side and the pro-life side is *not* that they favour women’s rights and we love the baby. The real difference is that they think you can separate the two and we say you can’t. The pro-abortion mentality claims you can love the mother while killing the child. The pro-life mentality asserts that you can’t harm one without harming the other and you can’t love one without loving the other. The pro-life position has never been, “Love the baby and forget about the mother.” It is rather, always and only, “Let’s love them both.”

It is said that the “pro-choice”/ pro-abortion movement masks over reality, and for all its rhetoric leaves women only three things: a scarred mind, a wounded body, and a dead baby. In Deuteronomy (30:19) God tells us to ‘choose life’ so that we may live, therefore, we must show by our prayers and action that we are truly pro-life people.

Children are both a wealth and a hope for the human family and Our Lady must weep at the sight of the millions of babies that are being aborted around the world. Every day about 126,000 babies are aborted. It is important for you to know that while groups like

ASPIRE like to focus on what is called the 'hard cases' such as pregnancies that occur as a result of rape or incest,

- 95% of abortions are carried out for reasons of convenience e.g. the woman feels that because of her economic situation she cannot afford to have a baby, or she is studying and feels that having a child will disrupt her studies;
- 2% of abortions are carried out because of the health of the mother
- 2% of abortions are carried out because of the health of the child
- 1% of abortions are carried out because of rape or incest.

My friends in Christ, I returned from England recently to learn that I was awarded the Maconia medal by a well-known journalist, an avowed atheist, who had appeared on a TV programme with the Chair of ASPIRE and me to discuss the issue of abortion. In his weekly column in the newspaper he awarded Independence Day medals to various individuals and I was awarded his Maconia medal.

Well, let me tell you that I don't care who calls me 'Maco'. As Christians we have a duty to be constant 'macos' to ensure that abortion is not legalised in T&T. You see, on that TV programme, when the Chair of ASPIRE said that 80% of Catholic women want abortion, my dougla blood rushed to my head so 'ah get on a bit bad'.

Even Jesus was angry when He saw what people were doing in His Father's house He threw down tables etc. in the temple. In this battle for our children's lives there can be no pleasantries. We need to name the sin and stand firm in our objection to the ruthless way in which unfounded statistics are being used by pro-choice groups to try to influence public opinion.

As part of their strategy ASPIRE had brought a so-called Catholic Theologian called Sheila Briggs from America to talk to people in T&T. That is part of the pro-choice strategy. We have learned about the strategies of pro-choice/pro-abortion groups from Dr Bernard Nathanson, who was the founder of one of the largest American abortion groups – NARAL. He had conducted over 75,000 abortions and had a conversion experience when he made the film *The Silent Scream* which showed a foetus trying to escape from the instrument that he was inserting in the mother's womb to abort the baby. He is now pro-life and he says that the strategies that are used are as follows:

**Firstly**, they try to capture the media and lie about the number of back street abortions that are taking place – without any real evidence they inflate the numbers and also try to win public support by focusing on the so-called 'hard cases' such as rape and incest. **Secondly**, they vilify the Catholic Church. No matter which other faith communities oppose abortion, they focus their attacks mainly on the Catholic Church. **Thirdly**, they deny scientific evidence by stating that what is growing in a woman's womb is not a human being, or is not a person.

It is also important to remember that abortion is big business and many people have become millionaires from aborting babies. For example, statistics show that one of the

largest pro-choice groups in the USA – they run the largest number of abortion clinics there and run abortion clinics in various parts of the world - makes over half a billion US dollars per year. Dr Noreen Johnson, a Trinidadian Doctor who lives in the USA and who headed an abortion clinic there, admitted that she increased her salary from \$30,000 US to over \$100,000 US per year just by carrying out abortions. She is now pro-life and has joined the struggle to save our babies. There is also a lot of money being made by individuals from selling the body parts of aborted babies. (See Canadian News Magazine, Alberta Report – August 25, 1999 and Dr Harold OJ Brown’s article in Human Life Review).

Those who wish to promote their pro-choice agenda will go to any lengths to do so. Do you know that in July this year – 2004 -, despite clear Catholic teaching to the contrary, American abortion advocates in Latin America distributed a prayer card asking the Virgin Mary to intercede to establish abortion on demand throughout Latin America?

Many participants at a meeting which took place in Puerto Rico, called the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development, were stunned when the pro-abortion group, Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), and its Latin American counterpart, Catolicas por el Derecho a Decidir, released a prayer card of the Virgin Mary, with the words "The love of God and of Mary of Guadalupe is greater... For women's lives, safe and legal abortion" superimposed over the image of the Virgin Mary. The back of the card says, "Dear Mary of Guadalupe, we thank you because your love is greater, because you listen to us without judging, because you know our heart and you respect the intimacy of our decisions."

Imagine the ‘boldfacedness’ of pro-abortion advocates seeking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary to bring victory to their cause of establishing abortion on demand for women and girls throughout the region. One observer said, "How insulting it is that CFFC, a rich American pro-abortion group, would attempt to use the Latin American people's strong devotion to the Virgin Mary to impose their abortion agenda here."

What is even more disturbing is that CFFC members call themselves Catholics. As one comment on a website stated: “Some people are not content knowing that they are going to hell, they want to get on the express train to hell”.

There is a saying that God wears pyjamas but He does not sleep. God is not asleep. Our Prime Minister has clearly said that his Government is “Pro-Life”. Thank God for that. The people of T&T are also not asleep. A few weeks ago the Guardian published the results of an Ansa McAl/UWI poll which shows that the majority of T&T citizens do not want to legalise abortion in our country. Who is smarter than a Trinbagonian? We eh stupid, we can see through the illusion of the concept of ‘safe abortion’ – a yarn which the pro-abortion groups love to spin.

If you ever saw the films *The Silent Scream* and *Hard Truth*, you will know that abortion can never be safe for an unborn child as the child always end up dead and it is generally

not safe for the mother either. If you ever have an opportunity to read research produced by e.g. Dr David Reardon, Elliott Institute, Illinois, USA, about the physical and psychological effects of abortion on women, you will know that no one can claim that legal abortion can be safe.

The same physical and psychological complications that are associated with illegal abortions, are also associated with legal abortions e.g. pelvic inflammatory disease, uterine perforations, ectopic pregnancy, placenta praevia, excessive bleeding, retention of placenta. Also, 28 out of 34 studies in worldwide literature indicate an increased risk of breast cancer associated with induced abortion.

Post abortion trauma, a profound array of psychological and emotional disturbances that occur to a woman following an abortion include: depression, guilt, suicidal urges, anger, nightmares, flashbacks, drug and alcohol abuse, panic attacks etc. Just visit the website: [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org) and you will read of the horrific effects of abortion, including legal abortion, on women and their families. There is a new film (March 2004) by American producer, Keith Clinton, entitled: "Tales of Abortion". It highlights the effects that abortion has had on the lives of black women in the USA. Since abortion was legalised in the USA in 1973, 13 million black babies have been aborted. More black people die from abortions there than from all other causes added together e.g. AIDS, violent crimes, accidents, cancer, heart disease.

Pro-choice groups like to give the impression that having an abortion is like going on a Sunday school picnic. You go in, you come out – no problem! They try to hide from the public the gruesome details of abortion. The draft document prepared by ASPIRE in their attempts to legalise abortion in T&T makes horrific reading. Inter alia, it proposes to allow minors, that is, girls under 18 to be able to obtain abortions without informing their parents or guardians and without obtaining their consent.

Their proposals could lead to some women obtaining abortions at any stage of pregnancy. This could lead to the use of a procedure called: "Partial Birth Abortion". Under this procedure, the baby, who may be full term and ready to be born, is pulled by forceps out of the mother's womb up to his/her head. The doctor then stabs the back of the child's neck with a pair of scissors, inserts a catheter, sucks out the child's brains, crushes his/her skull and delivers a dead baby. Do we want to legalise this in T&T? I don't think so! History will judge us on this issue.

Dr Reardon's survey on post-abortive women found that 94% regretted the decision to abort. Most of them said that if they had someone to walk with them through their difficult time they would never have aborted their babies. It is also important to remember that over 60% of girls and women who abort their children do so not through choice but because of coercion. That is, they are forced to do so by boyfriends, husbands, parents and so on. I know from my own voluntary work in England that abortion hurts women and entire families.

My Commission held a vigil on 'Abortion' at Our Lady of Fatima RC Church in Curepe a couple of months ago. The session was led by Mikkel Trestrail, Chair of CCSJ's Standing Committee on Prayer – you may have read about him recently. His disability has not prevented him from achieving his goals. He came 7<sup>th</sup> in the world in A'Level Sociology and also did well in other subjects. We need more committed young people like Mikkel to help us in the pro-life movement.

After the vigil, a woman approached me and asked me for a lift home. I will call her Pat to protect her identity. As we drove towards her home she told me of her experience. When she was young she became pregnant and her boyfriend told her that he would leave her if she did not have an abortion. She was distraught. No one seemed to be willing to assist her.

She prayed and God gave her courage. She decided to have her child. Her boyfriend left her before the baby was born. Her life was a struggle but she said that her faith was strong and she knew that God would not abandon her. She was happy she had borne her child. In 2002 when Emmanuel Community held their Interfaith March Against Abortion, her daughter, who was then 20, walked with her on the March. When they arrived at Queens Park Savannah her daughter burst into tears, wept uncontrollably and hugged her mother. She expressed her thanks to her mother for not aborting her. And do you know, that when the boyfriend, who had left, became terminally ill, he returned to his former girlfriend, the mother of his child, for assistance and it is that same child, whom he wanted aborted, who helped to nurse him until he died?

Pat's story reminds us of the need for all of us in our daily lives and in our parishes to minister to the needs of those women in unplanned pregnancies who may feel isolated and who need kindness and support. Our Catholic response should be to minister to their various needs with love, compassion and support. We all want and need compassion, acceptance and love in our lives. We should not judge them.

Through acceptance of these women as they are and through offering them compassion and friendship we can try to help them to find options that are more acceptable than abortion. Many of those who have abortions do not have them because of "freedom of choice," but rather because they feel they have *no freedom* and *no choice*. Often they face a lot of pressure to abort their child. Yet in the struggle against temptation and sin, there is always sufficient grace to do what is right. *"God keeps his promise. He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test he will give you a way out of it so that you may be able to endure it" (1Cor10:13)*. Pat resisted this pressure.

As a mother herself, Our Lady wants us to help such women to deal with those issues that have made pregnancy a crisis in their lives. Let us dedicate ourselves to helping them to find the dignity they merit and the possibility for a better future for themselves and for their children. Offer your support to groups such as Emmanuel Community, Families in Action, Mary Care Centre, Living Water Community and other groups that, inter alia, offer assistance to pregnant women in distress.



We need to address the issue of how we can change minds and hearts and some of the structures of our communities so that when a woman in a difficult situation becomes pregnant it need not be a crisis that she must face alone. We need to consider seriously how we can make it more possible for babies to be born and how we can build a society in which a child, his/her mother and all her family can live with dignity and hope.

Being pro-life is not an easy task. But then, when Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow Him, He did not say that it was going to be easy. Remember, we are people of the Beatitudes (Matthew & Luke): Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. (*Verse 6*). Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (*Verse 10*).

Don't despair; Our Lady's pro-life stance will give us the courage to fight the battle that is being waged for the lives of our unborn children. Our Lady wants us to stand in solidarity with unborn babies and their mothers.

My brothers and sisters, it was Thomas Jefferson who said that a nation must take measures to encourage its members along the paths of justice and morality. The basic moral test of a nation is how it treats its most vulnerable. Unborn babies are vulnerable and depend on your voices – your prayers and your action to protect them from the evils of abortion.

Abortion is not only a religious issue but a human rights and civil rights issue. It is an issue of life and death, of fundamental human dignity and of the basic and unconditional respect we are bound to have for each other, including the unborn child. All life issues are interrelated. As Catholics we are encouraged to live out a “consistent ethic of life”. We must respect, promote, and enhance human life at every stage and in every context. It is said that all those who are promoting abortion are already born. In this week-end's Catholic News you will read that His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, has stated that all people of goodwill cannot afford to be indifferent to the slaughter of innocent children such as those who were killed in Russia recently. In *The Gospel of Life* (1995) he strongly urges us to stand up for the rights of the unborn. In the midst of all the crime and violence in our country/world; in the midst of the spiritual and moral decay of our society/world, abortion is an unacceptable answer to the challenges that face us. We are dehumanised and diminished by abortion.

We cannot abrogate our responsibility. Each of us has a duty to help shape a society more respectful of the life, dignity and rights of the human person. So, as we stand here before Our Lady and before God today, let us renew our resolve to defend life in its every phase as a blessing and a gift from God. Our Lady will lead the way like a beacon of light. She who loved her Son, Jesus, loves every single unborn child because she knows that God knows each one before they are even formed in their mother's womb (Jeremiah, Isaiah etc.)

**I wish to end with an ABORTION PRAYER:**

Can a mother forget her infant and be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, God will never forget. In Isaiah 49: 15-16 He says: See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name."

O most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, at this most critical time, we entrust T&T to your loving care. Most Holy Mother, we beg you to reclaim this land for the glory of your Son. Open our minds to the great worth of human life and to the responsibilities that accompany human freedom. Free us from the falsehoods that lead to the evil of abortion.

Jesus, Heart of Mercy, we offer you these prayers through the gentle hands of your Mother, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, for the unborn babies of the world whose lives are in danger of being ended through abortion.

Dear Lord, we ask for your mercy on those mothers who, for whatever reason, feel that they are unable to raise their babies. Holy Spirit fill them with the grace to accept the great gift and cherish the life which God has given them and not to destroy their children before birth. Lead them to groups such as Emmanuel Community where they will receive assistance.

Lord, there are many women who are hurting because they have had abortions. Wipe away their tears, grant them the grace of repentance and reconciliation with you. Help them to trust in your forgiveness and to learn how to forgive themselves.

Lord, strengthen the workers in your vineyard. Give them courage and strength to carry out the work you have given them. Help them to be shining beacons of hope amid the darkness and despair.

Dear Lord, in all circumstances let us hold our faith as a shield as we stand firm for the greatest gift that you have given to us: life. Shed your light on all your people so that they will respect the sacredness of human life. Let them know that every human life is precious in your eyes. **AMEN**