

# OCA

## ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

Work of the Church / Reflections in Christ / January 2021

### Address at the Virtual March for Life

By Metropolitan Tikhon

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I greet you all in a spirit of peace, brotherhood, and unity as we march together this day. This year is, of course, different. Usually, we gather together in person for this march and we draw strength and encouragement from each other's presence. With the current health crisis we still march, albeit virtually, and we do so with no less firm conviction or common purpose. And it is this common purpose which brings all of us here from so many different backgrounds and walks of life: because we wish to protect the most vulnerable among us.

The children destroyed by abortion have no actions they can take or voice to speak with. They have done nothing right or wrong. They have committed no crimes. They have no power. They are truly the most vulnerable among us and so it is up to us to act and speak for their protection.

This is a good task. It is a sacred task. It is sacred because God Himself is a protector: the "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps. 68:5). He is a rescuer, a savior, especially of the vulnerable. Joseph, unjustly sold into slavery, was rescued from his brother's treachery (cf. Gen. 37). When God's people were groaning in their oppression in Egypt, they cried out to Him, and He rescued them from their condition (cf. Ex. 2:23-25). Throughout the Holy Scriptures, God tells His people to avoid oppression of others, to act justly, help the afflicted, and rescue those who cannot rescue themselves. It is a strong message: God is patient but will not tolerate the victimization of the defenseless.

And so protecting those who cannot protect themselves is a task God asks of us all. It is a difficult task with a long road ahead. Nevertheless, we have been shown “what is good” and what “the Lord require[s] of [us]... to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic. 6:8).

How do we do such a thing? How can we hold justice in one hand and mercy in the other? We certainly cannot minimize the destruction that abortion has caused. The ending of every life is tragic and God’s will for all people is that they “may have life and to have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).

We understandably want justice when we see the catastrophe of abortion and how it perpetuates a culture of death. We naturally come to this march in order to speak for life to the men and women in government. To the ones who do justice in our nation to bring the death to an end.

But what of mercy? Are we willing to love mercy as much as doing justice?

We only need to look at the last year to see what great lengths we have gone to protect the most vulnerable during the pandemic. We have completely changed our lives out of loving concern for the elderly, the immuno-compromised, and those most at-risk for COVID-19. Are we here today willing to go to such lengths to reduce another death toll?

Are we willing to go as far out of our way to support the many people working tirelessly to care and support those families in crisis? Or to save the life of a child by being the support they know they can count on? I know for you here today the answer is “yes”. Because life is precious and sacred and a gift from our creator.

You and I cannot control the destruction the decision to abort a child causes, as hard as that might be to face. But what we can do is become the people that our family, friends, and neighbors know will love them and help them if they face that situation. We cannot make the decision to keep the baby for them, but we can make it easier for them to make the right choice.

And so I call on you and ask you to work together to bring options, real options, to mothers so they don’t turn to abortion. We have many excellent charities which need our support: our crisis-pregnancy centers, adoption agencies, and women’s support organizations. We can, and should, apply our God-given

creativity to create pathways out of the difficult situations these young, scared mothers find themselves in. After all, they are looking for alternatives. Let's be the ones to provide them.

I also ask you to encourage the fathers who are themselves often young and scared and needing courage. Support them to take responsibility and not push the mother to take the easy way out.

Be the people that others can rely on to help them and be with them if they find themselves with an unplanned pregnancy.

It will be the thousands of little acts of help and mercy that will change minds and allow the tide to turn. Because as powerful as words might be, our actions are more powerful still. We don't want our voice to become one more noisy voice in an already noisy world. Our deeds will match our words because we want what the Prophet Jeremiah wants: to "do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood" (Jer. 22:3).

So today, as we march, amidst justice and mercy, let us not forget "to walk humbly with your God." We march for life, not for death, we march for peace, never destruction. With every step have a merciful heart towards all: the unborn, mothers, fathers, and all people who are made in God's image and likeness. Have mercy upon us all, O God, and breathe thy Holy Spirit upon us and give us strength, as the Righteous Judith prays: "For thy power depends not upon numbers, nor thy might upon men of strength; for thou art God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forlorn, savior of those without hope" (Judith 9:11).

May the God of peace, justice, mercy, and love be with us today and guide us all throughout the rest of our lives.