Follow his lead

Let us not be naïve. Our witness to the sanctity of human life may even involve being confessors and martyrs for the Faith. "We have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: the eclipse of the sense of God and man, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism, which, with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test. Those who allow themselves to be influenced by this climate easily fall into a sad vicious circle: when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity, and his life; in turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity, produces a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence" (EV, no. 21).

As cardinal, Karol Wojtyla visited Philadelphia, the birthplace of our Constitution, during the 1976 bicentennial year. There, perhaps inspired by the Holy Spirit, he foreshadowed the themes and challenges of his pontificate and the future role of the United States when he spoke of an "ultimate confrontation between good and evil." Nineteen years later, he wrote: "This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life.' We find ourselves not only 'faced with' but necessarily 'in the midst of' this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life" (EV, no. 28).

However, we are not alone. Many non-Catholics and non-Christians, through grace and reason, are joined with us in this crucial struggle for life, although certainly "the unconditional choice for life reaches its full religious and moral meaning when it flows from, and is formed and nourished by faith in Christ. Nothing helps us so much to face positively the conflict between death and life in which we are engaged as faith in the Son of God who became man and dwelt among men so 'that they may have life, and have it abundantly [Jn 10:10)" (EV, no. 28).

In God's providence, the transition between John Paul II and Benedict XVI took place in a Eucharistic year. It is in the Eucharist, and in Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament, that our Lord remains with us, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, until He shall come again. John Paul II said; "Christ's blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in the sincere gift of self" (EV, no. 28).

As Pope Benedict XVI said during his installation, "I ask everyone to intensify in coming months love and devotion to the Eucharistic Jesus and to express in a courageous way the Real Presence of the Lord." Only there will we find the strength to persevere and be joyful in our defense of human life at any cost.

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Pamphlet 181

John Paul II - Apostle of Life

Father John McCloskey

Be not afraid

All warriors in the crucial battle to protect human life from "conception until natural death" mourned the death of our Holy Father John Paul II. For some of us—perhaps many of us—he is the only pope we have ever known, recording the third-longest reign in the Church's 2000 year history. For those with a longer historical memory, John Paul is the witness to hope who transformed the post-conciliar crisis with the simple command, "Be not afraid." Pope Benedict XVI, our late pontiff's closest collaborator, has expressed a similar experience: "I seem to see his smiling eyes and listen to his words, addressed to me especially at this moment: 'Do not be afraid.' The death of the Holy Father John Paul II, and the days which followed, were for the Church and for the entire world an extraordinary time of grace. The great pain for his death and the void that it left in all of us were tempered by the action of the Risen Christ, which showed itself during long days in the choral wave of faith, love and spiritual solidarity, culminating in his solemn funeral."

The worldwide reaction to John Paul's final illness, death and funeral is unprecedented in time. Literally millions traveled to Rome, many who had no lodgings stood for long hours in lines that crept past the pope's body in St. Peter's Basilica, and attended his packed funeral in St. Peter's Square. Billions more turned to television, radio, the press and the internet to be united with this event. All of this took place in a world where only one in six people are Catholic. How can such an overwhelming testimony to the champion of life coexist with widespread contradiction? In the richest countries, babies are being aborted by the millions, other millions are dying of AIDS due to

unnatural sexual promiscuity, epidemic levels of venereal disease plague developed nations, birth rates are below population replacement needs in much of the West, and many nations are pursuing for same-sex partners (with increasing success) a right to marry and adopt children. So what moved the inhabitants of such a world to honor the chief warrior against the Culture of Death?

We mourned this Vicar of Christ because holiness is irresistible. We were drawn to John Paul because he was a saint, and he is already canonized the old-fashioned way, by popular acclaim. Furthermore, diverse onlookers expect the official process to be speedy. Almost everyone recognized sanctity in John Paul II, even if they did not share his faith. Only those with graceless souls or loveless hearts could fail to appreciate the super generous gift from God that was Karol Wojtyla. Yes, even the envious recognize him as the greatest man of our time, knowing that his legacy will be carried out long after the last of us who knew him has gone to judgment and received eternal reward or punishment.

Live his legacy

In his 26-year papacy, John Paul II delivered many messages to the Catholic faithful and the world, as evidenced by his 26 encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, discourses on well over a hundred apostolic visits throughout the world, and almost uncountable audiences in Rome. In fact, John Paul's teachings account for well over half of the Church's magisterial doctrine. Scholars and theologians will long debate about which of his writings is the most important. However, for us warriors in the battle for life, there is little doubt that *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) tops the list.

At an early age, Karol Wojtyla learned what happens when individuals and societies lack the most basic respect for the human person. His father fought in the First World War. It was the disastrous beginning of the worst century in history, since 100 million died by unnatural causes and tens of millions more were sacrificed to abortion. A brief period of freedom and national independence for Poland beginning in 1919, the year before Karol's birth, was brutally ended by the murderous tyranny of first the Nazis (1939-45) and then the Communists (1945-89). Young Karol Wojtyla watched and prayed and acted and survived, progressively arriving at deeper understanding as a student, seminarian and priest. He further grew in charity and wisdom as bishop, cardinal and pope, declaring that the only solution and hope for the human race lay in the defense and propagation of the "sanctity of human life" as created by God and guided by His Holy Church.

In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul wrote: "The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. Here too we see the permanent validity of the words of the Apostle: 'And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct' (Rom 1: 28). The values of being are replaced by those of having. The only goal that counts, is the pursuit of one's own material wellbeing. The so-called quality of life is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic sufficiency, inordinate consumerism, physical beauty and pleasure, to the neglect of more profound dimensions—interpersonal, spiritual and religious—of existence" (EV, no. 23).

The 1989-90 collapse of Communism came about due to its inherent inhumanity, the powerful intercession of our Lady of Fatima and the millions who heeded her pleas. At this juncture, the Holy Father turned his attention to the increasingly decadent and depopulating West, whose obsession with sexuality as an end in itself is almost definitional in explaining the Culture of Death.

Know the language of love

"Sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts" (EV, no. 23).

No one in history has so exalted the beauty and holiness of sexual love in holy matrimony as did John Paul the Great. His "Theology of the Body," is that "theological time bomb," as papal biographer George Weigel has called it, due to detonate sometime in this new century. In this rich teaching, he clearly identifies the obsession with self and sensual pleasure that can be traced back to the Fall.

John Paul realized that while this fundamental battle for life must be fought on many levels, the most important being the supernatural, nonetheless all of us must participate in one way or another on the level of "politics and government," as "[T]he original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of parliamentary vote or the will of the people—even if it is the majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the 'right' ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way, democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves toward a new form of totalitarianism" (EV, no. 20).

In the U.S., we have seen John Paul II's analysis borne out in the recent case of Mrs. Terri Schiavo, who was starved to death with the consent of all branches of government. This tragedy only encourages us to use all means, supernatural and natural, to return to our heritage in Revelation and natural law, from the Fathers of the Church, as well as the Founding Fathers of our country.