

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2023**

**“THE ORTHODOX BELIEFS CONCERNING 2 CURRENT ISSUES”**

Today, many parishes are having some special prayers at the end of the liturgy (sent to us by the Orthodox Christians For Life ministry) to commemorate and give thanks to God for something very important that happened a year ago yesterday on June 24, 2022.

Yesterday was the one-year anniversary of when the Supreme Court overturned its 1973 Roe v Wade decision legalizing abortion on demand in America. Today we give thanks that a great step took place a year ago--- returning the abortion issue to the states for them to each decide. So today we will thank God for this, we will pray that greater success in defending life may still happen, we will pray for the mothers and babies, we will pray for the abortionists to repent and turn to God.

We hope there will still be greater successes in trying to get rid of abortion, but last year's change was a big step. Already we can be sure----there are thousands and thousands of babies alive today who would not be alive if this legal change had not happened.

Of course, the pro-abortion people are having fits because their slaughter of unborn babies has been prevented to some extent. So they fight back. There will be two votes coming up later this year in Ohio that will deal with whether or not very permissive abortion laws will take effect (killing a baby could be legalized right up to just before birth!)---one vote in August, one in November. Please be aware of these issues being voted on, please study them, and please vote, as an Orthodox Christian in line with our moral beliefs. Vote to not allow more killing of the unborn.

What is it that we, as Orthodox Christians, believe concerning this issue? We believe human life begins at conception and that the embryo in the womb is a living human being made in the image of God, not just a blob of cells as the pro-abortion people say

This is obvious in the Bible. In Jeremiah 1, we read how the Holy Prophet Jeremiah was consecrated by God to be a prophet while he was still in his mother's womb. And St. John the Baptist, whose birthday we are celebrating, rejoiced to be in the presence of Christ (Luke 1:44) while still in the womb of his mother St. Elizabeth. St. Luke says St. John “leaped for joy” within his mother---that sounds real human!

And on March 25<sup>th</sup> we celebrate one of our great holy days---Annunciation. That was when, as we read in the gospel of St. Luke, Jesus was conceived in a virgin conception in the womb of St. Mary. He who was God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, took on human nature and lived in His mother's womb for 9 months. Obvious, He was fully human, not just some "product of conception", one of the favorite terms of the pro-abortion people.

And it has always been the clear teaching of our Orthodox Church since our beginning 2000 years ago. An unborn child is a human being and should not be killed. And that it should not be legal. Abortion was common in those days. It was our Orthodox Church who got it outlawed in the Roman Empire. And now we have to work at doing that all over again! Thank God, there are many outside our Church who agree with us! May God give success again.

It is also very important to remember that abortion is not an unforgivable sin. God forgives us of sin when we repent and ask for mercy. That is just as true with abortion as with anything else. Through confession and absolution, God forgives and brings us back to Him.

Often, though, people who have been through abortions need help. And we can arrange post-abortion counseling for those who have been traumatized and need some help getting whole again. And through our parish's Orthodox Christians For Life, and through the Orthodox Zoe For Life ministry, physical aid can be given. If you need help, or know someone who does, just let me or one of our Orthodox Christians For Life parishioners know.

God forgives, God will help.

I also want to take this opportunity to speak about another hot moral issue in the world today. And I think there is an indirect tie-in here to the abortion issue.

It seems to me that when our society some decades ago went so directly against the law of God as to say that it is fine to kill unborn children that this severely broke something in the moral fabric of our land. What could be a more direct slap at God than to decide killing His little ones is permissible? And ever since then we have just been taking one step after another into moral darkness and chaos. Our nation, to a great extent, decided God's laws don't matter anymore. When our nation did a similar thing long ago by allowing slavery, look at the moral chaos---look at the horrors of the Civil War that resulted. And now look at the moral chaos we are in.

The most recent step down further into moral darkness is now all the rage in America---the transgender movement. It's all over the press and social

media, it seems to be taking over the culture. Parades, drag shows for children, pornographic books in schools.....even some churches (thank God, not Orthodox) have gone with this trend.

So what do we Orthodox believe? The basic answer is right at the start of the Bible, in the very first chapter. We read in Genesis 1:27—"God created man in His own image; male and female He created them."

An obvious truth here-----God made 2 genders, 2 sexes. Not dozens of genders that some now claim are real. So if someone says to you that they are "non-binary" (having no specific gender); or that they have 2 genders at once; or have one or more of the new imaginary genders; or have now the opposite gender from what they had at birth.....it's not true. That is all imaginary. That person is either male or female. Either a "he" or a "she"—not a "they".

In reality, it is impossible to actually change genders. You can feel like you are a different gender. You can dress like you are..... You can act like you are..... You can take hormones so some things about you will seem like a different gender.....You can have your God-given body mutilated by wicked doctors (willing to chop off some of your body parts and then build you some new fake body parts)..... You can do all of that and it doesn't change reality. You really still be whatever you were born as.

If at death, a genetic test is done on your remains, it will show that if you were male at birth, you are still male at death. If you were female at birth, you are still female at birth. That cannot be changed, even by surgeries, etc.

We Orthodox believe in the obvious reality----when it comes to gender and sex, you are always going to be what you were when you were born.

So what should our response be to transgender people? Some of them obviously have psychiatric problems. Some are depressed and stressed and perhaps think changing gender will help them----really not true because suicide rates are high among transgender folks. Some may go this route just because it's so popular now and looks like fun. I think some may do it just to be rebellious and self-assertive.

We should very strongly stand up against the movement and do all we can to help it go away. We should try to influence our culture, the laws, education, etc. to turn away from the transgender fraud.

But what about the individuals involved? Should we respond to them with anger, hatred, or mockery? No, because we are Christians. We should respond with love, prayer, and help. As we should with anyone involved in spiritual darkness.

So don't mock a transgender person, don't avoid him or her. Instead, be friendly. Get to know the person. If possible, well enough that they might eventually be open to help from you, maybe open up to you. And then perhaps by friendship and conversation you can begin to steer them to Jesus Christ.

For this to possibly happen, we have to get to be friends. Probably difficult. But not impossible. And if they see you as being kind, even if disagreeing with their beliefs and lifestyle, perhaps that will start to pull to them to think about your God. Maybe you will be the channel to bring them back to reality and to Christ.

Because more raucous parades, more hormones, more surgeries---that's not what they need. Like all of us, they need Christ and His light to shine into their darkness. They are not hopeless cases. We all have darkness in our past (and still some dark spots in our lives now), but Christ shines His light upon us. And He can do that for anyone, no matter how much of a stretch it might seem. So befriend them, get to know them. If they start to open up to get some help, help them find it. If they are willing to talk to a priest, I (and many other priests, I'm sure) would love to talk with them.

God loves transgenders. He wishes to save them and make them people of light, not people of darkness and chaos. Get to know them if possible. Try to help them and steer them to help.

And pray for them----that God may bring them out of darkness into His light!