



U.S. bishops applaud as the homily is delivered by Cardinal Rigali during the Vigil Mass for Life in Washington Jan. 21. (CNS photo)

‘Reasons for rejoicing’

WASHINGTON (CNS) - Despite the fact abortion has been legal throughout the United States for 34 years, there are “reasons for rejoicing,” primarily because of lower abortion rates and increased public opposition to abortion, said Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia.

Cardinal Rigali, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, was principal celebrant and homilist at a Jan. 21 Mass on the eve of the annual March for Life. It was held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

“The rate and number of abortions in the United States continue to decline, most notably among teens,” he said to applause during the homily. He said many teens “are wisely choosing to abstain from sexual activity” because of religious and moral values and also to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

“To be free of disease, to be free of the fear of an ill-timed pregnancy, to be free of a broken heart - this is the freedom that we want for our young people, and we rejoice that it is unfolding,” he added to further applause.

“Another reason to rejoice is that the American people are becoming more pro-life. According to a significant poll last year, general support for Roe v. Wade fell under 50 percent for the first time since 1973,” Cardinal Rigali said, eliciting more clapping.

“More and more citizens are coming to question abortion and to recognize - as a starting point for deeper conversion - that

there is something radically wrong with abortion and the support given it by our laws,” he added.

“In the midst of the enormous challenge posed by threats to life, there are new reasons to hope that the truth of God’s law will prevail as a great light in our nation as our people move increasingly toward valuing human life from its earliest and most vulnerable stages onward. This indeed is cause for rejoicing in the Lord!”

The Church’s position on abortion is “one of profound concern for the unborn and deep compassion for all those affected by abortion,” Cardinal Rigali said. “With utmost respect we express in the public debate our strong conviction that something terribly wrong has weakened our nation - something that flagrantly violates human rights and human dignity, in addition to the law of God.”

The cardinal blasted “the so-called freedom of choice” that resulted from the Supreme Court’s Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973, which legalized abortion virtually on demand, saying that those who get abortions do not experience freedom.

“Freedom comes only when they are able to turn to God in their sadness and brokenness and accept His forgiveness, His mercy and His healing grace,” Cardinal Rigali said. “They become truly free when they are able to acknowledge the truth of the wrong that they committed, and the greater truth that there are no limits to God’s loving mercy or to His desire



Nellie Gray of Washington D.C., who has led the march since its beginning in 1974, stands on stage at the 34th anniversary March for Life Jan. 22. (CNS photo)

for our salvation. Jesus Himself tells us: ‘You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’”

Despite an afternoon snow that made Washington’s streets slick, the shrine was again filled to capacity with worshippers who had set out from home in chartered buses long before winter’s first snowfall in the nation’s capital.

Worshippers, many of them students, also

cramped the back vestibule and the side chapels of the shrine, and filled up its lower level as well. Many of them wore T-shirts or sweatshirts with pro-life slogans, although some wore replica jerseys bearing the name and uniform number of their favorite sports star.

With the crowds in the upper church and on the lower level, the shrine estimated the number at 10,000.

Cardinal Rigali told the young people, “You are called to fulfill a special role: to bring all your energy to promote the cause of life. The Lord is calling you and confirming you in strength. The Church and the nation are asking you to rise up to this challenge.”

Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., who had announced his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination Jan. 20, drew cheers when he was spotted inside the shrine for the Mass. Brownback, who became a Catholic in 2002, talked with supporters, signed autographs and posed for photos.

At the March for Life in 2005, some in the crowd had held up “Brownback 2008” signs while he spoke.

Outside the shrine after the Mass, along with the requisite snowball throwing, some scattered cheering erupted once some had learned the Indianapolis Colts had beaten the New England Patriots for a berth in the Super Bowl. “Colts won!” some people shouted; the game had been played while they were inside the shrine for the Mass.



More than 10,000 people attended the Vigil Mass for Life celebrated in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. on Jan. 21. (CNS photo)



Morgan Eile, 16, from St. Louis, prays at the youth rally at Constitution Hall Jan. 22 prior to the pro-life Mass and the March for Life. (CNS photo)

Philadelphia Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the U.S. Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities, celebrates the Vigil Mass.



‘My generation wants to take on the challenge’

By LAUREN SMITH

The weekend of Jan. 21, I was privileged to join a group of 19 youths from the Diocese of Tulsa on a pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. where we attended the 2007 March for Life. Of all the words that come to mind while looking back on our trip, there is one that stands out the most: Exhaustion.

Rising at 6 a.m. every morning, spending the entire day on our feet and finally going to sleep at around midnight every night left our eyes drooping. Such tiredness would not typically be ideal for a vacation to our nation’s capital, but that’s just it - we were not on a vacation.

We were on a pilgrimage, a prayer-journey, one in which we all learned to step outside our own needs, wants, aches and pains and join together with thousands of people on a trip that was worth every hour of sleep lost and millions more.

The morning of the March, Jan. 22, my group attended a youth rally and Mass at D.C.’s Verizon Center. Some 20,000 other Catholic teens joined us. Seeing such a crowd left me speechless, with goose bumps up and down my arms.

To me, such a sight boosted an incredible amount of hope for the future of the Catholic Church as well as the pro-life cause.

After Mass, we headed to the march starting point. We waited for an hour for the march to begin while listening to pro-life speakers. The crowd was immeasurable. I could not believe the number of people who attended.

The fact that every single person who was there were united for one purpose and that they shared my passion for the cause left me awestruck.

Then, the March for Life began. We found ourselves in the middle of the enormous crowd, and whether looking in front of us or behind, we could not see anything but an ocean of people praying, chanting or silently representing the cause. As a whole, we left no piece of pavement uncovered.

During the March we realized we were more than just 19 kids from Oklahoma. We were part of something bigger, something that is a step toward reform where America has gone astray.

The future lies in the hands of the young people, and it is up to us to stand up to make those necessary changes. We were tired, hungry and very cold, but for a couple of hours that afternoon, we put aside our complaints and turned our attention to a more important issue.

The March for Life gave us hope. It showed us that we can and should be a part of movements toward a more positive future. We have a long road ahead of us in fighting for what we know is right, but with the glimpse of what I witnessed in Washington that day, I feel secure in knowing that my generation wants to take on that challenge.

We are ready to make positive changes in our country. This march was only the beginning.

Lauren Smith is a senior at Bishop Kelley High School.