

Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You

A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity of the Unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in Public Life

Executive Summary

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer 1:5).

A young Jeremiah heard the Lord speak these words to him over 2500 years ago. In these times in which we are living, the scourge of abortion ignores the reality that humans are made in the image of God, known and beloved by God. This pastoral letter addresses all Catholics, but especially Catholics in public life, calling for deep reflection on the evil of abortion and on the meaning of receiving Holy Communion, the Bread of Life.

There are four pivotal points to this letter:

1. *The gravity of the evil of abortion:* Science teaches that human life begins at conception. The ending of life through abortion deeply wounds the woman and destroys the foundation of a just society; it is a “pre-eminent priority” because it violates the right to life, the foundation of all other rights. As Catholics we must be a voice for the voiceless and the powerless; there is no one more defenseless than a child in the womb.
2. *Cooperation in moral evil:* Who bears culpability when an abortion takes place? It is never solely the mother’s act. Those who kill or assist in killing the child are directly involved in performing a seriously evil act. Someone who pressures or encourages the mother to have an abortion, who pays for it or provides financial assistance to organizations that provide abortions, or who supports candidates who advance pro-abortion legislation also cooperate by varying degrees in a grave moral evil.
3. *The meaning of choosing to receive the Holy Eucharist:* The Church has taught consistently for 2000 years that those who receive the Eucharist are publicly professing their Catholic faith and are seriously striving to live by the moral teachings of the Church. Those who reject the teaching of the Church on the sanctity of human life and those who do not seek to live in accordance with that teaching place themselves in contradiction to the communion of the Church, and so should not receive the sacrament of that communion, the Holy Eucharist. We all fall short in various ways, but there is a great difference between struggling to live according to the teachings of the Church and rejecting those teachings.
4. *The responsibilities of Catholics in public life:* From the three points above it follows that Catholics prominent in public life have a special responsibility to bear witness to the fullness of Church teaching. In addition to their own spiritual good there is also the danger of scandal: that is, by their false witness, other Catholics may come to doubt the Church’s teaching on abortion, the Holy Eucharist, or both. This is becoming increasingly challenging in our time.

We are all called to conversion, not only those Catholics who are prominent in public life. Let us understand what is at stake here and work together in building a culture of life. To those who need to hear this message clearly: Turn away from evil and return home to the fullness of your Catholic faith. We await you with open arms to welcome you back with joy.
