



Diocese of Worcester  
Office of the Bishop  
49 Elm Street  
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

January 2012

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

January 22, 2012 marks the 39th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision which, with its companion case *Doe v. Bolton*, legalized abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy in every state in the nation. In accordance with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, **January 22<sup>nd</sup> is to be a “day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life.”** When January 22<sup>nd</sup> falls on a Sunday, as it does this year, the observance is transferred to January 23<sup>rd</sup>. We also unite our prayers on this day with the hundreds of thousands of the faithful, including those from our own diocese, who will attend the March for Life in Washington, DC.

With over 54 million lives lost to abortion since 1973, we need not look far to witness abortion’s devastating effects. Countless women and men, mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, and friends have been wounded physically, emotionally, and spiritually by this tragedy. Let us take the opportunity of this upcoming Day of Prayer and Penance to re-commit ourselves to proclaiming the Gospel of Life, working to transform the culture of death into a culture of life, and sharing the message of the merciful and reconciling love of Christ with our suffering brothers and sisters and with a society desperately in need of the redeeming love of their Creator.

We live in an age where new threats to human dignity, particularly in its most vulnerable stages, are emerging at an increasingly rapid pace, including the current threat of the legalization of physician-assisted suicide here in Massachusetts. We must resolve to remain vigilant and prayerful in the face of these challenges and work to overcome them in the days ahead.

I encourage our diocesan parishes and institutions, and all the faithful, to observe reverently the **Day of Prayer and Penance on January 23<sup>rd</sup>** within their communities. Let us unite our hearts and minds through special acts of prayer and sacrifice on this day, to uphold the inherent dignity of all human life from conception to natural death.

I also invite you to join me at the Cathedral of St. Paul on Sunday, Jan. 22 at 7:30 p.m. for our Respect Life Mass which will begin the vigil of this observance and at which we will bless those beginning their pilgrimage to the March for Life.

May all of us respond generously to the challenge the late Blessed Pope John Paul II put forth in *Evangelium vitae*: “A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. May an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from the heart of every believer.” Our active participation in the shared commitment to the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person, will, with God’s grace, truly work toward the good of all humanity as we strive to live the Gospel of Life.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester