

October is respect Life Month and I have traditionally used one of my October homilies to comment on current Pro-Life issues. This month I would like to touch on two areas. The first is the Washington State Supreme Court's unanimous ruling two weeks ago that the state's capital punishment penalty is unconstitutional. Archbishop Sartain and the other bishops of Washington state write, "The Catholic Church's consistent belief is that every human life is sacred from conception until natural death – it is this principle that has energized our efforts for decades to abolish the death penalty." Earlier this year the bishops had testified before the legislature for the repeal of the death penalty, citing our imperfect record in imposing it without racial bias, and the danger of executing an innocent person. I'm not a legal scholar. I can't judge whether the Supreme Court's ruling is good jurisprudence. But simply speaking from the perspective of the moral law, the Catholic Church opposes capital punishment and so I'm gratified by the ruling. In some ways these issues are always complicated, but in other ways they're not. It comes down to: we must not kill one another.

The second topic I would like to preach on stems from an October 2, Wall Street Journal article I read, entitled, “Is it Ethical to Choose Your Baby’s Eye Color?” The article focuses on a California fertility clinic named The Fertility Institutes that now offers that service to its customers. When I went to their website I was greeted by a close up of a white baby with big, blue eyes staring out at you (perhaps signaling the optimal baby!), and the words in large print, “Announcing Eye Color Selection!” then, “Welcome to eye color selection! The newest option available only at the Fertility Institutes to 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘parents to be.’”

The clinic, using IVF technologies and DNA analysis, promises to allow the parents to choose their child’s eye color. The Wall Street Journal article explored whether this would be ethical. My purpose in bringing this technological capability up in this homily is two-fold. First, it can serve as an occasion to repeat what I’ve preached about before regarding IVF. The Catholic Church’s answer to The Wall Street Journal’s headline question is clearly, “No, it’s not ethical.” The Church

recognizes that the pain of infertility is very great among couples who long for a baby. But she also teaches IVF is an immoral means to that end because it creates human beings outside the natural sexual acts of the married couple, thereby undermining one of the purposes of sex, and making human beings the product of technology rather than the fruit of that marriage act. In addition, there's the fact that when one embryo is selected, many others are destroyed, ending human lives.

And, then, I think about children growing up in such a culture, where children are created to meet their parents' every expectation, now down to eye color. I see young people today already being very anxious about failure and performance and disappointing parents and teachers. This technology plays into all those fears and perfectionism. In the Wall Street Journal article. Dr. Marianne Jennings, a retired professor of biological ethics at Arizona State University, pointed out, "Part of parenting is learning you can't control another life." That experience of our limitations should begin at the embryo stage.

But besides those basic teachings of Catholic moral theology, today I want to look at what this fertility clinic's advertisement and the newspaper article reveal about the larger Pro-Life struggle. People can get tired of the Church's Pro-Life message because it can seem to be a string of alarmist clichés. One such phrase is “designer babies” that has long been used when Church people talk about IVF and other reproductive technologies. When these technologies became a reality some decades ago, Catholics and others warned that they would lead to children designed by parents or other authorities — “designer babies”. Human beings would be manufactured. Many people thought this language was exaggerated scare tactics. But now that future is here – and our society is using IVF pretty much as was predicted when the moral dangers of this reproductive technology was first debated.

The question asked by the Wall Street Journal's headline, “Is it Ethical to Choose Your Baby's Eye Color?”, is mostly rhetorical. In fact, that question has already been answered in the affirmative years ago. A

residual gut-level squeamishness can't stand up against the logic and demand that flow from our secular society's definitions of the human being beginning only at birth, and sex as having no necessary connection to reproduction.

But what I want to stress today is how well the modern prophecies of the Catholic Church in the realm of marriage, human sexuality, and reproduction have been borne out. In this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* we can look back with sad satisfaction that St. Paul VI's predictions of what would follow if contraception became common have come true. The Fertility Institutes' new eye color selection option is only the latest confirmation that the Pro-Life movement's dark warnings will be fulfilled.

Many people today are terrified that climate scientists' predictions about the technologies bringing about climate change are being ignored to the detriment of humanity's future. But they

themselves often ignore the Church's warnings of the disasters waiting for those who make the human person a product of technology.

You may or may not agree with the Catholic Church's moral teachings. But my point today is simply that her prophetic predictions of our society's future seem to come true with distressing regularity; and that the world should be less certain that Catholic warnings about the on-going dissolving of the human person can be ignored as nonsense. That future is fast becoming our reality. Perhaps if a Prophet's predictions are fulfilled, we should also listen to the Prophet's larger message.