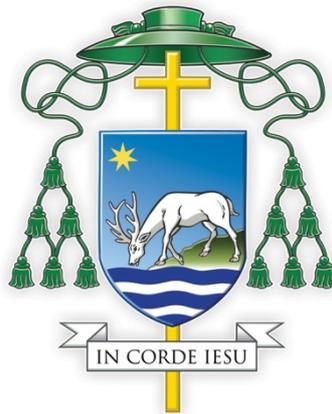


BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD



A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PHILIP
to Fr. Bruce Barnes, the Clergy, Religious and Faithful
of the Parish of Our Lady and the Saints of Guernsey
for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, 7th June 2020.

My dear Parishioners,

Listen to this line from the Gospel account of the Virgin Mary visiting her cousin St. Elizabeth: "As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1: 41). Notice what St. Luke says: "the *child* leapt in her womb." He does not say "the *foetus* leapt in Her womb" - no, the child. That child, of course, was John the Baptist, who, sensing Christ in Mary's womb, leapt for joy. Indeed, in this scene, there are two pregnant mothers, one very early term, the other at twenty-four weeks (Luke 1: 37). One is Mary, the Mother of God, carrying in Her womb, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. The other is Elizabeth, "getting on in years" (Luke 1: 7), carrying the Prophet sent to prepare the way of the Lord (cf. Luke 1: 76), of whom, Jesus later said, "of all the children born of women, no-one is greater" (Luke 7: 28).

The point is this: both these babies, like every child, were God-given. Every child conceived in the womb is God-given. Every child is willed personally by God. Every child is placed on earth by God for a purpose. Carried in the womb, Jesus and John were not just biological materials, an assemblage of cells, embryos. No, they were babies. From the moment of conception, they had infinite dignity and value. Already, they were persons, children, people - yes, vulnerable, fragile, dependent on their mothers - but beautiful, free personalities, full of potential.

My dear brothers and sisters, I'm writing to urge you to prayer and to mobilise you to campaign and action. I want you to get up and to get going! For once again, persons within the legislature of Guernsey are seeking to threaten human life. Two years ago, there was a misguided campaign to legalise assisted suicide. Now, under the bogus word "modernisation", an attempt is being made to further liberalise abortion, to make it a lot easier and a lot more common. They want to allow abortions much later in pregnancy, abortions to be carried out with less red tape, abortions to take place at home and outside hospitals, and, grimly, abortions right up to birth for a disabled child, a child unwell, or a child with Downs Syndrome. How must a person with Downs Syndrome feel about this?

The proponents speak about "choice," giving mothers a choice. But what about the baby's choice? They say it makes things "fairer" for women. But what about fairness for the child? They refer to abortion euphemistically as a "procedure," a "termination" with help from "the professionals." But what procedure can justify any professional terminating the life of an innocent baby? The more you see what an abortion is, the more you can see it is anti-life, anti-human and anti-woman.

Let's be clear. 'Thou shalt not kill' (Ex 20: 13) and the injunction 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mk 12: 31) are commandments that form the bedrock of Jewish and Christian morality and indeed, of every religion. Moreover, they are instinctive principles written deeply into every human heart. They ground the laws that govern every civilised society on earth. This is why abortion and the current proposal to "modernise" - that is, to increase - its availability in Guernsey is fundamentally detestable. Yes, we do appreciate the pressures and the dilemma faced by anyone unintentionally pregnant and we pledge to do all we can to assist and support them. But Let's be clear: there are two lives at stake here, a child and a mother. It is completely wrong to take away the life of either.

Abortion has damaging consequences that result, sooner or later, in guilt and emotional trauma. Later, many bitterly regret it. Those who soothingly propose the new legislation never refer to this damage or to the medical complications that can arise or to the sense of grief or PASS, Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome. No wonder the Health and Social Care Committee fostering the legislation acknowledges that a decision to undergo an abortion is never taken lightly.

This is why I am appealing to all of you and to everyone of good will in Guernsey to resist and to face down these sinister proposals coming before the legislature. The post-COVID lockdown is not the right time to ram through legislation like this, not without a full, open and frank consultation and debate. The proponents argue that the legislation was put forward more than twelve weeks ago. Yet this is completely disingenuous, given that during this time everyone's attention has been absorbed with the pandemic.

St. Paul warns us that it's "not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignities and the Powers, ..the spiritual army of evil" (Eph 6: 12). These dark forces have many resources at their disposal and much support from individuals in the media. However, little flock, remember that Jesus said: "Be brave: I have conquered the world" (John 16: 33). Remember that those on the side of Truth listen to Him (cf. John 18: 37). Remember too that they cannot stop the Holy Spirit from speaking actively in the depths of the human heart.

So my friends, I appeal to you as Catholics to mobilise. Speak out against these proposals. Write to your deputies. March and campaign. Join with brothers and sisters from the other Christian communities. Unite with all people of good will. And above all, pray. Prayer is potent. Pray earnestly that this legislation will be overthrown. Pray that the rights of children - the right to life - will be upheld.

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth