**BISHOP MICHAEL PFEIFER, O.M.I.**
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of San Angelo

# The Human Embryo Created by God is Sacred

Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI

The human embryo created by God is indeed sacred because it is a human person in its earliest stage. Sadly, the embryo is being threatened more and more and killed by many.

The embryo is made by God with the cooperation of a married woman and man in the Sacrament of Marriage. The main purpose of marriage is to give new life to our world as the married couple increase their love for one another. It is God who gives the soul in the embryo. This is confirmed in the word of God that we have read for years in Psalm 139:13-16, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Sadly, the embryo is being destroyed more and more in various types of abortion. Abortion presently is the major cause of death each year in our country. According to reputable sources there are at least 1.1 million every year. More than 65% of those deaths are caused by abortion drugs sent through the mail with little to no medical oversite. In addition to ending the lives of babies, abortion pills are dangerous for the mothers who take them. These pills have been found to cause four times as many complications as surgical abortion. Each Parish should have well prepared people, especially women who can reach out and access parents who might be contemplating abortion or have had an abortion in the past. Compassion is at the very heart of this mission, because care for these mothers and babies are given hope and a future.

Pope Leo XIV in his wonderful Encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas, explores the foundation and principles of our understanding and appreciation of human life, especially human dignity which forms the basis of Catholic Social Doctrine as well as for the good of all humanity. Pope Leo stressed "that the dignity of every human being that having been willed, is created and led by God" and is unchanged and fixed – with God-given features of human nature. This comes from our being created in the image and likeness of God.

This does not mean, however, that our grasp of the depths of human dignity, of its contours and dimensions, or of the ethical demands that the recognition of that dignity entails, does not need to develop and mature. Precisely because it comes from our being created in the image and likeness of God, human dignity always remains an important measure, a mystery to be contemplated and plumbed more deeply.

This belief that every human being has an inherent, equal, and inalienable dignity has served as the principal foundation for recognizing and defending universal human rights, across diverse cultural and legal contexts. Today, however, that principle understanding of human dignity is under enormous strain by pro-abortion groups such as Planned Parenthood and has been reduced to just a fragment of the grandeur and nobility of our being. This is why we should encourage our legislators to put into law the Life at Conception Act.

Many in our society today put aside the principle of human dignity which has led to more abortions and a lack of appreciation even for the smallest member of our society, which is the embryo. We stress here that all Pro-Lifers working together: Bishops, Pastors, teachers, parents, all people need to proclaim that we believe each human life is a precious gift from God and we have

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

the responsibility to God to proclaim this truth guided by the Holy Spirit. This should inspire us to have many more masses and prayer gatherings for the precious unborn and their mothers, and to promote this truth, especially in prayer services in front of agencies that perform or promote abortions.

A major cause of killing the precious unborn and seeking genetically to modify human embryos has rightly generated shock waves. Fr. Tad Pacholczyk, a Priest of the Diocese of Fall River and who serves as a Senior Ethicist at The National Catholic Bioethics Center, in a recent article, from which I have taken much of the material that follows, points out that a recent set of experiments at Columbia University modified human embryos and has rightly generated shock waves. Attempting to make genetic modifications in a more efficient manner than had been previously achieved is precisely the kind of experiment that could and should have been carried out in animal embryos, not human embryos. The same basic biological information reported in these studies could readily have been obtained that way. Mothers of the precious tiny persons are reminded that they are not alone. That their baby's lives matter and that Jesus Christ sees them with compassion and love. There never has been a more hidden or voiceless people group extinguished at the scale as the pre-born face today.

Moreover, the human embryos produced in these experiments were often intentionally sacrificed to obtain their embryonic stem cells, which are used for additional research. Creating humans for the purpose of destroying them is invariably seriously unethical and should be illegal. In these experiments, parents were asked to hand over their "leftover" tiny children from fertility clinics so scientists could carry out experiments on them. This is the reality of abortion today. But what many women experience in that moment is not treated. It is panic, pressure, isolation and fear.

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

The fact that Columbia University Human Embryonic and Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research Committee as well as the University's Institutional Review Board granted their approval for these procedures and experiments, reminds us of the moral bankruptcy surrounding so many of these review entities at our renowned universities.

It is important to note that the Catholic Church is open, in principle, to gene editing to fix genetic abnormalities, as long as the risks are very low for the embryonic patient and heritable changes to the DNA of our species are not made. Such repair is simply a form of direct medical therapy for the afflicted individual. If such therapy on embryos were technically feasible, it should occur in the womb of the mother following a natural conception, not through procedures reliant on the immoral practice of IVF. The experiments reported by the Columbia University researchers were clearly nontherapeutic, as the plan always involved destroying the embryos.

Human embryos are among the most vulnerable of God's creatures. They constitute a unique class of individuals deserving of special protections, as genetic enhancements of embryotic children becomes more common place, it is important to learn from these failures. Now is the time to remedy the widespread lack of understanding, and for serious reflection on the moral and ethical issues involved in genetic modification of human embryos.

When married parents encounter the heartache and worry that arise when they find themselves with serious difficulties in conceiving a child of their own, often, they jump immediately to IVF – in vitro fertilization – where they attempt to control all factors of timing, embryo creation and selection – leaving little to nature and God's design. IVF is now a $3 billion industry, which is largely unregulated and seemingly unconcerned about the

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

long-term health risks for women or children. The first and most obvious is the serious moral problem raised by in vitro fertilization, as that invariably requires fertilizing of several eggs in the laboratory at the same time. Typically, some embryos are implanted in the uterus in the hope that one will survive. The embryos not implanted are either discarded or frozen for later use. Many do not survive the freezing or defrosting process. It is the sad reality that the great majority of embryonic children created by IVF will end up dead sooner or later. Every child conceived in IVF is truly deserving of respect and love: each is a human person, regardless of the manner of conception. As Christians we must come to understand that IVF puts the lives of women and children at risk. As Christians we must all stand for the dignity of every human as a gift from God and not as a product to be manipulated even with the best of intentions. Some pregnant women seeking prenatal care register for an appointment, but sadly have to wait weeks or even months before being accepted. Our communities should help such women to receive immediate care. The delay can lead to the woman to seek an abortion. Encouraging communities to give more access to provide prenatal care to pregnant women will reduce infant fatality and in some cases abortion for pregnant mothers and their children.

Hopefully many of our Congress people and all of us will support the efforts for the Life at Conception Act to affirm and protect all life efforts for every human being — born and unborn, deserving of dignity and protection from the moment of conception. This Act recognizing the scientific fact that since human life begins at the moment of conception; it would extend the 14th Amendment protection to pre-born children at all stages of life; provide stiff penalties to those abortionist who violate the law; and save every

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

year hundreds of thousands of preborn babies, our precious unborn little sisters and brothers. The Life at Conception Act urges Congress' constitutional authority to define personhood, fulfilling our moral and legal obligation to safeguard the lives of the unborn. Hopefully all of us as children of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus, will pray for and actively support all efforts for this Act to become a reality in our country.

Sadly, at the same time we need to be aware that there are abortion groups that are actively involved in promoting and doing abortions. One of these is Planned Parenthood, which is again receiving hundreds of millions of our tax dollars. Then Pro-Life America points out that Planned Parenthood is making a gift of $47 million into advertising and voter turnout operations in the twelve most critical House and Senate nationwide. Voters across the country will head to the polls to determine whether to protect children or abortion in their constitutions. But when everything is up for grabs, one thing never changes: your prayerful presence saves the lives and closes abortion business.

I add here about the practice of surrogacy. The Catholic Church sees this as an immoral act. Pope Leo has stated "surrogacy violates the dignity both of the child, who is reduced to a product, and of the mother, exploiting her body and the genitive process." Sadly, I also bring to your attention a war on newborn life that is quietly taking hold across America. Several states like California, Washington and Minnesota have already changed their laws to allow the murder of abortion survivors. Quietly changing words like "prenatal" to "perinatal" to allow babies to be killed 28 days after birth, while others are stripping existing protections for abortion survivors. Thank God there are legal teams fighting this

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

in state courts, if necessary, fight all the way to Supreme Courts to fight against infant deaths.

These tiny unborn children of God depend on you and me. We need to offer many more masses or other prayer services for them. We need to constantly proclaim this truth, that they are human persons in our Churches, in our homes and in our daily lives and especially in prayer services in front of abortion agencies that perform or promote abortions. To support this important Pro-Life ministry, it is important to remember that the Gospel is the foundation of our response to abortion.

A special time to pray for embryos and their mothers is during the month of October. Every October the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates *Respect Life Month*, and the first Sunday of October is observed as *Respect Life Sunday*. As Catholics, we are called to cherish, defend, and protect those who are most vulnerable, from the beginning to the end of their lives, and at every point in between. During the month of October, the Church asks us to reflect more deeply on the dignity of every human life. Additional material can be found at respectlife.org/respect-life-month.

*Respect Life Prayer*

*God of Life, Creator of all, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of life in all its stages. During this Respect Life Month, we ask for your guidance and strength to stand as witnesses to the dignity of every human being, from conception to natural death. Open our hearts to your love, so that we may defend the unborn, care for the vulnerable, and support those facing difficult circumstances. Grant us the courage to speak the truth with compassion, to act with justice, and to work tirelessly for the protection of all life. Lord, may we be instruments of your*

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927

*peace and mercy in a world that too often forgets the value of life. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we may promote a culture of life where every person is welcomed, cherished, and protected. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church Midland, MI*
*www.blessed-midland.org | hello@blessed-midland.org*

Mailing Address: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate MAMI
323 Oblate Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216
Office: 210-477-0939 I Cell: 325-374-7500
email address: mpfeifer@omiusa.org Administrative Asst: 210-477-0927