

April 5 – The Resurrection of Our Lord – The babe once wrapped in swaddling cloths, the crucified Man wrapped in burial linens on Good Friday is now the Lord of Life risen from the dead! He has died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3) and He has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20). He has sanctified every stage of our life from conception to death, even promising resurrection to our mortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:53). We are not to hasten death, but we also need not fear death because our Redeemer lives (Job 19:25), and in Him shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22)!

April 12 – Quasimodo Geniti (Easter II) – The disciples locked themselves in the upper room out of fear (John 20:19) ... fear of the unknown, of what might happen. Like the dry bones seen by Ezekiel, fear can leave even the boldest and strongest feeling dried up, crying out, “Our hope is lost” (Ezekiel 37:11). An unplanned pregnancy, a terminal illness, a sudden death—just to name a few—these can leave us feeling like all hope is lost. But the Lord did not leave the disciples in fear without peace, and neither will He leave you. “Peace be with you!” Christ is risen, and in Him is the peace that surpasses all understanding. “Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27). Jesus knows how to turn death into life and fear into gladness. He has the nail marks to prove it.

April 19 – Misericordias Domini (Easter III) – The lost, the straying, the injured and the weak (Ezekiel 34:16): these are loved by the Lord, and they should also be loved by each of us. The widow, the orphan, the unborn, the single parent, the dying: for these Christ the Good Shepherd lives, as surely as He does for all His sheep. And there are still other sheep to be brought into this fold (John 10:16). With this in mind, we also seek the lost and work to bring back, bind up, and strengthen fellow lost and wandering sheep, as the Lord gives us opportunity, knowing that Christ has also died for them (1 Peter 2:25) and that His goodness and mercy are for all.

April 25 (St. Mark, Evangelist) – Today we honor “John” Mark (Acts 15:37), the Gospel-writer and missionary companion. He and Paul got off to a poor start. In fact, Mark deserted the team (Acts 13:13)! Yet despite this early failure, this same Mark later proved to be very useful to Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). One’s past, even one’s shameful sins against life like abortion or euthanasia, does not preclude one from service in God’s kingdom. After believing the Gospel of forgiveness and salvation for ourselves (Mark 16:16), we too can become effective evangelists according to our vocations.

April 26 – Jubilate (Easter IV) – The conception and birth of every baby should be cause for joy (John 16:21). Sadly, millions of babies every year are conceived but never born. Either by intentional abortions or unintended miscarriages, joy falls victim to sorrow. A life is lost, and even if the world does not know it, a mother does. In His mercy that never comes to an end (Lamentations 3:22), Christ has died for our sins. He forgives. He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love (Lamentations 3:32). Now you know sorrow but also know that when Christ appears, you shall be like Him, pure as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3). Then your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

May 1 (St. Philip and St. James, Apostles) – Today we remember Philip and James the Less/Younger (not the brother of John). These two men were among the original twelve disciples and apostles of Jesus. But Scripture speaks nothing more of this James, and only a handful of times and in minor roles about this Philip. Still, they are no less a part of the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Neither one's accomplishments nor popularity, nor size, nor age determines one's value in the household of God. Every stone has its place in God's holy temple—even you! (Ephesians 2:19-22).

May 3 – Fifth Sunday of Easter – The psalmist invites us to “Come and see what the Lord has done!” (Psalm 66:5). The works of the Lord are many, but the greatest of all is the redemption He has provided us through His Son. Because Jesus bore the cross for us, God's anger “is turned away” (Isaiah 12:1). Whatever stain of sin haunts our past, including the sin of abortion, that stain can be washed clean by Christ's blood. Thanks be to God for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation He gives us in Jesus Christ, our Savior! With joy we draw water from the well of salvation (Isaiah 12:3). Jesus not only sends us the Helper, the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11), to nurture us in the faith, but also “every good and every perfect gift from above” (James 1:17), most notably, God's holy Word and Sacraments.

May 10 – Sixth Sunday of Easter – The Old Testament Israelites learned the hard way not to grumble against the Lord. When the Lord sent fiery serpents among them, many were bitten and died. But the people repented, crying out for mercy: “We have sinned! Take away the serpents from us!” (Numbers 21:7-9). God's answer? Make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole; then look upon it and live! We all tend to grumble against the Lord, plagued by our doubts and fears. Many seek to find their own way, and sometimes that way includes choosing to have an abortion or embracing physician-assisted suicide, but this is the way of death. Look to Jesus on the cross and live! Cry to the Lord in your trouble, for He alone delivers you from your distress (Psalm 107:5-6). Ask and you shall receive that

your joy may be full (John 16:24). Baptized into Christ, we embark on a new path—the path of life. We must be “doers of the Word” (James 1:22) as we seek to bring help and hope to those who need our prayers and support in choosing life.

May 14 (The Ascension of Our Lord) – Christ ascended into heaven—not to be far from us—but to draw closer. While Elijah was taken into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:5-15), our Lord Jesus was lifted into the clouds where He was visibly removed from sight (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11). Yet now He is even nearer to us, as He is present in His Church, where His Word is taught and His Supper is celebrated. He rules all things, even in the midst of our enemies, for the ultimate good of His people (Psalm 110). Therefore, we take courage in fighting the good fight of the faith, including speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. We advocate for the unborn, for the weak, and for the sick and the dying. Not only do we proclaim that Christ is with us and helps us in our trials, but we also proclaim that He will come again with the clouds in glory—and then sin and death will be no more.

May 17 –The Seventh Sunday of Easter – The Israelites, through their idolatry, profaned God’s holy name. Yet in Ezekiel 36, God acts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring the sinner back to Himself through repentance and faith. He cleanses them from every uncleanness and gives them a new heart. The sin of abortion profanes God’s holy name. But there is hope and healing in Christ for those who have been haunted by the sin of abortion. Like the psalmist, the sinner cries out, “Have mercy on me, O God . . . wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin!” (Psalm 51). And He does. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, sin is covered, forgiveness is given, and life is restored. As those who have received “the Spirit of Truth” (John 15), we endeavor to speak the truth about life issues, to uphold the value and dignity of human life, and to “keep loving one another earnestly,” since “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4).

May 24 – The Day of Pentecost – When it comes to issues such as abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and euthanasia, man always thinks that he knows best. It is easy to create our own justification, for like the people at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), we want to “make a name” for ourselves. Yet our sin and rebellion only bring confusion and division. But God sent us the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2) that we would speak with one voice the truth of the Gospel: that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and by His resurrection has set us free, even from the darkness that lurks in our past. The Spirit “teaches us all things” – all that Jesus has done for us -- that our “hearts would not be troubled or afraid”

(John 14). Thus, we pray as in Psalm 143:10: “Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground!”

May 31 – The Holy Trinity – Life is precious. It is a gift. We cannot fathom all that God has intended and has in store for His people. “Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11). Yet we come before the Lord, like Isaiah, as those with “unclean lips,” and we dwell “in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6). The willful taking of an innocent human life in abortion is an abomination on our nation. Those who are given a new birth by Jesus in Holy Baptism by water and the Spirit (John 3) must be people who speak the truth of God’s Word: “You shall not murder.” We are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” We dare not sit on the fence when it comes to life and death issues such as abortion or physician-assisted suicide. The same voice of the Lord that “thunders” over the waters of creation and the flood (Psalm 29) now resounds over the waters of Holy Baptism, making us God’s own special people and calling us to be the voice of hope in a world shrouded by sin and death.

June 7 – Trinity 1 – Our Lord’s plan is not our own plan. This is one of the greatest struggles for every single person born to the human race. We assume that, because we seem to have destiny in our hand, we have the ability to plan every single aspect of our lives, right down to the very time and place we have a child. Abraham was just like us. He had accumulated great wealth and was well respected in the new place God had sent him to. He had everything except a child—and thus no one to whom to pass on his wealth and wisdom. However, God promised him a child! While God does not promise us the same, He does promise us a family built on the blood of Jesus who names us His heirs and gives us His wisdom.

June 11 (St. Barnabas, Apostle) – The name Barnabas means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). The disciples did not trust that Saul (Paul) was converted, but Barnabas believed and vouched for him (Acts 9:27). Although Paul is seen as premier, he would not have achieved that position without Barnabas. There is no telling how your encouragement can catapult the lives of others to greatness! Encourage young and old alike to live with sexual integrity and pursue marriage. Encourage a scared mother to keep her preborn baby alive and perhaps pursue adoption. You can do it!

June 14 – Trinity 2 – Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:14b). John the Apostle

leaves none of us unscathed. He reminds us that we cannot hate our brother and not be guilty of breaking the Fifth Commandment, which condemns us to death. How many of us speak with malice against our brother's health and wellbeing? How many of us fail to speak God's Word to our brother? God does hold us accountable for our thoughts, words, and deeds. There have been quite a few Hollywood storylines lately about groups of people determining value based on society's ability to support a certain number and type of people. Hollywood is a reflection of where our culture is already. If we think we are better off because we do not have certain people in our midst or because there are too many, we stand guilty before God of John's warning. Do not close your heart to your brother but give to him in need and love him as God wills.

June 21 – Trinity 3 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul” (Psalm 103). Our Lord is worthy of being praised with pure voices forever because He has done for us what we could not and would not deign to do for ourselves. He forgives us our sins, heals disease, redeems us from hell, crowns us with love and mercy, satisfies us, and renews us. How could we ever thank or praise our God and Lord enough? We cannot—but we can honor and obey Him as a portion of our thanks and praise. How do we honor Him? Hear His Word and believe. God has called us to care for human life, for God has done all this for human life. Every human life is precious from the womb to natural death. So, bless the Lord and care for your neighbor.

June 24 (The Nativity of St. John the Baptist) – On this day the Church from ancient times has honored the birth of the one who would proclaim a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel (Acts 13:24). In our time and country, this day also marks the anniversary of a Supreme Court decision that restored states' ability to restrict abortion. Inspired by John the Baptist, we continue to call our nation to repentance. But the goal is not merely to outlaw abortions but to also speak to hurting hearts the comfort that their iniquity is pardoned (Isaiah 40:1-2).

June 28 – Trinity 4 – “Am I in the place of God?” Joseph asked his brothers. Joseph's brothers feared that because Jacob was dead, Joseph would finally take vengeance. In our human world, there is nothing more powerful than the ability to take vengeance on those who have done us wrong. It is a wild and hungry desire that is deep within our bones. We think we can correct the injustices done to us by our own hands and by our own devices and schemes. Joseph had every right to hate his brothers and desire vengeance according to the law of man. His brothers had removed him from the eyes of his father, lied to his father, sold him into slavery, and caused him to suffer all sorts of trials—and now Joseph stood above them, able to command anything, and his father was dead. He could have killed his

brothers, and no one in Egypt would have cared or been surprised. Even the Hebrews would have understood. But God says, “Vengeance is the Lord’s.” It is not for us to take in our own hands but for the Lord to accomplish through His kingdoms. Joseph was blessed for giving vengeance over to the Lord and we will be as well.

June 29 (St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles) – Peter and Paul could not have been more different! Peter was among Jesus’ original disciples. Paul was a persecutor of the Church before his conversion. Peter’s ministry focused on the Jews; Paul’s was to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-10). Yet on this day, Peter and Paul are honored as equal pillars of the Church. The Church is built on the communal confession that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:16). So let us all have confidence in proclaiming the For Life message, wherever our particular mission field is!

Life Thoughts in the Church Year authors: Rev. Paul Clark (May), Rev. Dr. Aric Fenske (April), Rev. Joseph Signore (Festivals), Rev. Caleb Stoeber (June), Rev. Dean Suehring (April).