

**FREEDOM OF CHOICE ACT (FOCA)
AND
SIMILAR LEGISLATIVE MEASURES ATTACKING LIFE**

Clergy Talking Points

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
24/25 January 2009**

Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10
 Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-9
 Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
 Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

Theme: As the modern-day prophets of God, we are called to actively proclaim that disrespect for and destruction of human life at all its stages is a fundamental detriment to the health of our nation and a gross offence against God and humanity. At this hour in our nation, the radical anti-life legislation called the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA, H.R. 1964) along with other portending anti-life legislation and policies need to be the object of our prophetic witness.

Thematic: In the Prologue to his work *The Prophets*, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, a famed Old Testament scholar, asks a very thought-provoking question: "What manner of a man is a prophet?" He concludes that the prophet is one called by God out of ordinary life and its comforts in order to proclaim to Israel and/or the Gentiles the inevitable consequences of disobeying the Law of the Lord and the natural order established in Creation and Covenant. The proclamation is often heroically made at great personal cost; its goal is to bring Israel or the Gentiles to repentance.

Jonah: Jonah is called by God from complacency (and even jealousy) to make known to the Ninevites that the logical progression of their sinfulness would be the inevitable destruction of their society. Their social structure would not be able to withstand the disorder, nor would God's Justice or Wisdom allow the excesses of that nation to continue. Reluctantly, Jonah preached and, against the odds, the Ninevites repented and followed the ways of the Lord; their city—for the time—would survive and flourish.

Mark: Mark's Gospel lends to Jesus a certain prophetic urgency (1:2) in the proclamation of the Good News. His first words of ministry were "Repent! And believe in the Gospel." Repentance, (Gk. *metanoia*) of course, means a change of mind or a change of course. His first act of ministry was to begin calling the Twelve to this same prophetic witness.

Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) and Similar Anti-life Legislation

Background:

A proposed bill in the United States House of Representatives, the Freedom of Choice Act, is a fundamental affront to human dignity and decency and is, arguably, a violation of our Constitutional liberties in this land. Its passage would mark a nefarious legislative curve in our nation and would dramatically alter our ability to protect the most vulnerable of human life—life in the womb. Please consider the following points (c.f. Freedom of Choice Act: USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, September 2008,

http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/FOCA/FOCA_FactSheet08.pdf), and others that can be found in this resource packet:

- FOCA far extends the reaches of Roe v. Wade in both its legislative scope and its promotion of abortion rights.
- FOCA will invalidate laws to protect a woman from unsafe abortion clinics and to have adequate information about the risks of abortive surgery.
- FOCA will require taxpayers to pay for abortions.
- FOCA, as federal legislation, will force the states to allow “partial-birth” and other late-term abortions.
- FOCA will require states to offer abortions by non-physicians.
- FOCA will bar laws that protect the right of conscientious objection to abortion.
- FOCA will deny parents an opportunity to be involved or informed about their daughter’s abortion decision.

Actions: Prophetic witness against this bill needs to take many forms. It needs to involve phone calls to local Congresspersons and Senators and even the President. It can take the form of legal petitions and letter writing as well as peaceful protests (such as the March for Life in D.C.). It can also, among many other avenues, take the form of grassroots education among family, friends, and common constituents about the aforementioned facts regarding this bill.

Conclusions: God calls prophets in every age to make known the consequences of violating His Law or the natural law. As God called Jonah to Nineveh and Jesus called the Twelve to Israel, so also now is the Lord calling faithful Christians to be prophetic witnesses for life in our day. The well-being of our nation and the protection of the most vulnerable among us depend upon our response!