

Respect Life Mass – January 17, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 9:00am – 1,200 words

A very warm welcome to you all; thank you for coming to this Mass for Life and for supporting the cause of life! Even recent legislative actions have shown us that we must never flag in our determination to pray for and work for positive change in this area. And more than legislative action, we must always pray for a change of heart among the people of our land, that all will come to see the value of life and God as its author and its Lord. Bienvenidos a todos; ¡gracias por venir a esta Misa por la Vida y por su apoyo a la vida humana!

Yes, that God is the author and Lord of life is really the theme of the readings chosen for this year's occasion. And although we all know this, we must be reminded of it continually because of the continual threats against it in our culture and the ways that those threats condition us. The cause of life is truly the cause of evangelization, of inviting others into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes to us all while we are still very much in need of his help and invites us to follow his loving plan that leads to life in abundance.

I want to focus on this concept of relationship, I think – relationship with Jesus Christ, relationships with each other. Because often we feel helpless in the face of the legislative swings and societal trends. Yet since we are working also to change hearts, working on relationships is something we can always do. And perhaps it is more the area that the majority of us are called to work in. Relationships are between persons and happen in reality. But many things militate against that in our time. We are more isolated and disenfranchised than ever!

Yes, we must say that the past nearly 200 years, corresponding with the rapid development of new technologies, have really stood out as a singular period of history – and not generally in a good way. Technological development continues apace and it brings particular threats against our perception of reality and ability to relate with each other. Perhaps the latest of these is the proliferation and prevalence of artificial intelligence: computers “speaking” as if they were human beings; “relating to us” as if they were personal creatures.

Amidst this whirlwind of technological so-called progress, and our own eagerness to buy-in to the latest and greatest, we face no small amount of risk. I wonder if it's not a diabolical coincidence that this device that at least half of us reach for throughout each day is called an “Apple”; we take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil anew, like our first parents did. That about the other half of us are reaching for something called an “Android” isn't much better, for an android is only human in appearance, not in fact.

Yes, we regularly risk isolating ourselves from reality or at least distorting it, where life is properly lived. In the process, we isolate from each other and God. We have seen the fruits play out over and over. There are higher rates of mental illness than ever. Even this thing that I might find myself attached to, yet also seems to give me so much anxiety! A sense of dread might come over me if a real person actually attempted to call me and speak to me in living color! This is not normal; it is not what God intends. Something isn't working!

Rather, the healthy relationality that God intends leads to presence, empathy, charity, service, forgiveness, and so many other virtues and positive values. If Jesus walked the earth today, he would still go to a sinner's house in person and call him to follow him. He would still sit in public squares engaging with people. He would still be stealing away to pray to his Father. But he is walking the earth! He lives in you and in me! And so he challenges us to imitate him and so promote a culture of saving human encounter in our time, too.

There are, no doubt, countless benefits that come from our technological advances. But what I am saying is: we must be intentional in how we use these gifts and internalize what it means to put God and other human beings first, at the center; we must not become slaves of technology. I would daresay, too, that we all have at least one person in our family or our circle of influence that models this in a surpassing way: the person who shows up for everyone, who truly cares about humans, who looks up and out – and not merely down at a thing.

Perhaps as we pray today, we might be inspired to imitate that proverbial “one person” more; or, if somehow in our circle we don’t know a person like that, to strive to become such a person all the same. Our culture will never change in a positive way through the relentless pursuit of technological and legislative solutions. It will change above all because each of us strives to become more constant in valuing other human beings and recognizing the presence of God in our midst; in short, because each of us spends more time in reality.

And as Lent fast approaches, I wonder how each of us could work on this particular area. We should start thinking about it now; planning and counting the cost. How can I put technology in its proper place, and people and God in their proper places, which is always greater, always more important? How can I show up for others? Is there a relationship I need to mend? Is there someone whom I need to engage with? I’ve got my relationship with technology down pat: how can I improve my relationships with human beings? And so be better at this thing called life!

Dios es el autor y el Señor de la vida, y por eso la defensa de la vida comienza siempre en el corazón. Cambiar las leyes es importante, pero más importante aún es el mejorar las relaciones: cómo miramos al otro, cómo escuchamos y cómo acompañamos. Jesús nos muestra que la vida verdadera se vive en el encuentro personal, en la cercanía, en el amor concreto. Él no salvó al mundo desde lejos, sino caminando con las personas, entrando en sus casas y llamándolas por su nombre. Y hoy sigue haciendo lo mismo a través de nosotros.

En un mundo dominado por la tecnología, estamos llamados a vivir con intención, sin dejar que las cosas reemplacen a las personas, ni que las pantallas sustituyan la presencia real. La cultura de la vida crecerá cuando pongamos a Dios en el centro y al prójimo delante de nosotros. Al acercarnos al tiempo de Cuaresma, pidamos la gracia de vivir más en la realidad: de cuidar nuestras relaciones, de sanar lo que está roto, y de estar verdaderamente presentes unos para otros. Así daremos testimonio de la vida abundante que Dios quiere para todos. Let us improve our relationships, maintain a proper order of things, and live in reality always!