

I was having dinner with the Pope when worried pro-lifers started contacting me about his interview

BY FR. FRANK PAVONE, Tue Sep 24, 2013

September 24, 2013 (PriestsforLife.org) - As the Director of Priests for Life, known worldwide as a ministry within the Catholic Church that urges more preaching, teaching, and action against abortion, I was asked by many alarmed and confused people these past few days about the reported comments of the Pope that the Church should not be "obsessed" with this issue, and that there should be "balance" and "context."

Is the pope saying we should talk less about abortion? Is he saying that the emphasis the Church has placed on this issue has been a mistaken emphasis?

When I first received these inquiries via emails and text messages, I was actually in the presence of Pope Francis, in the dining room of his residence. I had spoken just hours earlier, at the invitation of the Vatican, about the Church's defense of the unborn child, and about the clear and strong position of the Church, expressed in many documents, that the right to life is our first right and the foundation and condition for all the others.



Fr. Frank Pavone and Pope Francis

So the news came to me with more than a little irony, and I immediately began to tell worried pro-life warriors that they had no reason to think that the Pope no longer wanted the Church to focus on abortion.

Pope Francis preaches on pro-life in a very integral way. He gives strong and clear messages that derive from the very substance of the Faith and a very broad vision of the demands that Faith places upon us. The conclusions and applications for the pro-life movement are undeniable, even if he does not use the specific words "pro-life movement" and "unborn."

This was very clear in his homily at his installation on March 19, when he spoke of the need to protect every person, especially children, from the "Herods" of our day who plot death.

And it was clear again in his Palm Sunday homily, which contained the very strong message to have confidence in the victory of life over death.

He said it this way:

"Let us look around: how many wounds are inflicted upon humanity by evil! Wars, violence, economic conflicts that hit the weakest, greed for money, power, corruption, divisions, crimes against human life and against creation!

"Jesus on the Cross feels the whole weight of the evil, and with the force of God's love he conquers it, he defeats it with his resurrection.

"Dear friends, we can all conquer the evil that is in us and in the world: with Christ, with the force of good!"

He mentions "crimes against human life," using the same word the Second Vatican Council used in *Gaudium et Spes* to describe abortion (an "unspeakable crime"). He urges us to see evil for what it is, and then never to lose confidence in the victory we have over evil, thanks to the death and Resurrection of Christ.

In his recent interview, he made it clear that the Church should put opposition to abortion "in context." This is neither new nor unwelcome. The Pope wants to see the renunciation of abortion put in the context of mercy toward the mother, and this is consistent with the pro-life movement's emphasis on "loving them both." In fact, in my personal conversations with the Pope, he particularly urged me to go forward with the work of Rachel's Vineyard, the largest ministry in the world for healing after abortion. He called it an "excellent work."

The Pope wants the teaching against abortion not to stand alone, as if it were a negotiable moral prohibition, but rather to stand in the context of our teaching about who God is. He made this clear in his June 16 homily at the worldwide "Day of the Gospel of Life" when he declared,

"The Scriptures everywhere tell us that God is the Living one, the one who bestows life and points the way to the fullness of life...The commandments are not a litany of prohibitions -- you must not do this, you must not do that, you must not do the other; on the contrary, they are a great "Yes!": a yes to God, to Love, to life."

"All too often, as we know from experience, people do not choose life, they do not accept the "Gospel of Life" but let themselves be led by ideologies and ways of thinking that block life, that do not respect life, because they are dictated by selfishness, self-interest, profit, power, and pleasure, and not by love...As a result, the Living God is replaced by fleeting human idols which offer the intoxication of a flash of freedom, but in the end bring new forms of slavery and death."

This approach **radically strengthens** the Church's opposition to abortion, because the Pope is saying not simply that it breaks the Fifth Commandment ("You shall not kill"), but that more fundamentally it breaks the **First Commandment** ("You shall not have other gods besides me") and that to disrespect life is to abandon God himself.

Nobody should worry or think that the Pope is in any way diluting the Church's strong and unchangeable stance against abortion, or contradicting all that **has already been said and written**, in documents like *The Gospel of Life*, about the urgent priority that this issue deserves. Some 50 million children are killed by abortion around the world each year. If we want to know how much we should focus on it, we only have to use human reason and ask what our response would be if 50 million adults throughout the world were killed each year by terrorism.

Long live the pro-life movement, and long live the Pope!