

Cast Your Vote For Life

By Bishop Victor Galeone

My dear friends in Christ,

An August 6th article in the Florida Times-Union told the moving story of Brenda Sartor, who at 28 years of age weighs a mere 60 pounds. Confined to a wheelchair, she has never walked or even crawled. She was born with a condition known as spinal muscular atrophy, a disease that kills 50 percent of the infants born with it before their second birthday. When she was nine months old, her doctor told Brenda's mother to put her in a nursing home and let her die in peace.

But Brenda refused to quit. Graduating from Middleburg High School in 1993, she set her sights on college. The article recounts how Brenda lived in an apartment with her mother in Gainesville, often staying up until 2 a.m. doing homework, and then getting up at 6 a.m. for class. Today, hanging on a wall in her home is Brenda's college diploma from the University of Florida.

October is Respect Life Month for U.S. Catholics. It's a time when we revisit the life issues and our commitment to them. Unfortunately, in today's society, where one's worth is measured by one's ability to produce, moving examples like Brenda Sartor are becoming increasingly rare. The reason is that their lives are snuffed out before birth, if the amniocentesis test gives even a hint of an abnormality.

The clash between the forces of life and death are most poignantly seen in our courts. Recently, the Florida Supreme Court struck down a law that required physicians to give 48 hours notice to a minor's parents before terminating the minor's pregnancy. What an aberration! We require a parent's permission before a school nurse may dispense an aspirin to a minor, yet forbid a physician from informing the parents that he is about to perform major surgery on that same minor!

Since 1973 adherents of the culture of death have won their victories not in the voting booth but in the courts. Accordingly, it's of paramount importance to elect to office only those representatives who staunchly support the life issues. Why? In most cases, court nominees are appointed pending approval of the Senate. And senators have become ever more intransigent in rejecting anyone who would interpret the law objectively in questions of life.

Take the case of the nomination of Alabama Attorney General William Pryor to the 11th Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals. Pryor, a committed Catholic, is unapologetic in his views on abortion, which he considers a serious moral wrong. Even though he has received the unanimous approval of the America Bar Association and even though he has testified that he will respect and apply the law of the land, his nomination is being blocked by a handful of senators in committee.

Someone may object that no one in public office should force his morality on others. Some candidates attempt to hide behind this charade, protesting: "I'm personally opposed to abortion, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a woman wants to have an abortion, that's her choice." Quoting from a talk that I delivered in Tallahassee last year, I ask you to judge the following cases:

- A legislator at the time of the Missouri Compromise: "I'm personally opposed to slavery, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a master wants to own slaves, that's his choice."
- A member of Congress in 1964: "I'm personally opposed to racism, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a restaurant owner wants to discriminate, that's his choice."
- A hypothetical legislator today: "I'm personally opposed to pedophilia, but I can't force my morality on anyone else. If a man wants to engage in that sort of activity, that's his choice."

Why is it that in each of these cases, we not only can, but in fact do “force our morality” on others? Because the civil rights of an innocent party are being violated. It’s the same in the case of abortion, euthanasia, or any other life issue: The civil rights of an innocent party are being violated.

Let me stress this all-important point. The time to mobilize ourselves is not when we are fighting the removal of a feeding tube from a comatose patient. By then it’s too late. No, the time to mobilize ourselves is before a general election. Let us educate ourselves on the basic issues. Let us learn the positions of the various candidates. And finally, let us vow never to cast a vote for anyone who does not support that most basic of all human rights - the right to life.