Divided court examines ‘undue burden’ test in abortion case

WASHINGTON (CNS)—The U.S. Supreme Court stepped into some contentious waters on March 2 when it heard oral arguments on abortion for the first time in nearly a decade, and almost 25 years since it issued a major ruling on abortion.

But even though some time has gone by, the court’s 1992 ruling in Planned Parenthood v. Casey had a front-row seat during the go-round. The Casey ruling also may have played a part in questions posed by Justice Anthony Kennedy, the only remaining member of the court that helped write that opinion.

And what Kennedy asked or didn’t ask on March 2 is being parsed by legal analysts and court watchers alike since he will likely be the deciding vote in the Texas case.

In a previous abortion case in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to uphold the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, signed into law in 2003 by President George W. Bush. The law had withstood several court challenges on constitutional grounds before it was upheld.

In Casey, the justices upheld provisions in Pennsylvania law requiring parental consent for minors, a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion, filing of detailed reports about each abortion and distribution of information about alternatives to abortion. It struck down a requirement that married women need to notify their husbands before having an abortion.

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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis will preside over a consistory to approve the canonization of five men and women, including Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, the Vatican announced.

The March 15 consistory will likely include the approval of canonization of Argentine “gaucho priest,” Blessed Jose Gabriel del Rosario Brochero and Blessed Jose Sanchez del Rio, a 14-year-old Mexican boy martyred for refusing to renounce his faith during the Cristero War of the 1920s, the Vatican said on March 7.

The meeting of cardinals and promoters of the sainthood causes, also known as an “ordinary public consistory,” formally ends the process of approving a new saint.

Although the canonization dates are often announced at the consistory, it is only believed Blessed Teresa’s canonization will take place on Sept. 4. That date celebrates the Jubilee of Workers and Volunteers of Mercy and comes the day before the 19th anniversary of her death, on Sept. 5, 1995.

“Teresa of Calcutta is a great example of a person of complete and total love,” said Pope Francis in a Sept. 5, 1997, message praising her. He spoke of her as one who “has no time for herself, for her needs, for her comfort, for her rest.”

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

YEMEN

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Notre Dame to honor Biden and Boehner with 2016 Laetare Medal

The honor is so named because its recipient is announced each year in celebration of Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, which this year was on March 6.

"Laetare," the Latin word for "rejoice," is the first word in the antiphon of the Mass that Sunday, which ritually anticipates the celebration of Easter. The medal bears the Latin inscription, "Magna est veritas et prevalebit." ("Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail").

While both Biden, a Democrat, and Boehner, a Republican, have been loyal and committed partisans, they were leaders who put the good of the nation ahead of partisan victory, seeking through respectful dialogue honorable compromise and progress," Father Jenkins said in his statement.

"Boehner's resistance to a simple reductionism made him suspect in his own party; Vice President Biden reminds his fellow Democrats that those in the other party are 'our opponents, not our enemies,'" the priest added.

Before his election as vice president in 2008, Biden represented Delaware in the U.S. Senate for 36 years. At age 29, he became one of the youngest people ever elected to the U.S. Senate. Soon after his election, his wife and infant child were tragically killed in an automobile accident, yet he persevered in caring for his family as a single parent and in serving in the Senate. He commuted between his home in Delaware and Washington for four years.

In the Senate, Biden served as chairman or ranking member of the Judiciary Committee for 17 years and played an integral role in the 1994 Crime Law and the Violence Against Women Act. He also served for 12 years as chair or ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, helping to guide issues and legislation related to terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, post-Cold War Europe, the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

Boehner became Speaker of the House in January 2011, and was re-elected in January 2013 and January 2015. He stepped down from the post and resigned from Congress last fall.

"When the Zulu people of South Africa greet someone, they say, 'Sawubona,' which means, 'I see you.' The one being greeted responds with 'Sibhoko,' which means 'I see here.' The greeter ends by affirming 'Ubuntu,' which means, 'I see you.' The one who greets ends it with 'Umkhosi,' which means 'I see you.'" Cardinal Turkson said.

The effect of racism, by contrast, is "to render people invisible from both the denial of human dignity, loss of identity, personal despair, social and political distrust," he added. "It unleashes a social and political distrust, and from that follows the denial of human dignity."

The criterion for 'see' can dissolve racism, must begin in hearts, Cardinal Turkson says

"Almost 30 years ago, the American Catholic bishops stated, 'Racism is not merely one sin among many: it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it means an equitable radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structures of our society.'"

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

"Ability to see can dissolve racism, must begin in hearts," Cardinal Turkson says

"How often do I overlook people who differ from me and my kind? Do my biases cloud my ability to fully see another person in his or her full human dignity? Admitting my failure to see the other as human is to begin the struggle to vanquish unconscious bias and interpersonal racism."
Christian optimism springs from a realistic faith

Some days, it’s hard to be optimistic about anything. The economy is not what it should be. Class warfare is raging as our government leaders and political candidates call each other names, and peace—at home and abroad—is more elusive than ever. Today, more than ever, we need Christian optimism and the theological virtue of hope.

What would be the source of this hope? Surely not the political process. Surely not the false glitter and empty promises delivered to us by the media. If the past year has taught us anything, it is that when the center does not hold, the extreme ideologues on the left and right rush in to fill the void fueled by a 24-hour news cycle that is desperate for the latest “gong show” moment to repeat endlessly and exaggerate as needed to feed our cavernous appetite for “news” that is largely gossip and scandal mongering.

And yet, Christians are called to proclaim Good News. We are challenged by virtue of our baptismal promises to reach out to others—especially those who have the least reason to believe us—and assure them that we have all been saved in Jesus Christ. That is what the popes have called “the new evangelization.” It is what Pope Francis calls “missionary discipleship,” the commitment to share our joy with people who have lost all hope on the peripheries of modern society.

In order to share our joy, we first have to uncover it, to release it from the layers of gloom and doom that overtake it, and to allow it to break through authentically and enthusiastically for all to see. To be successful, missionary disciples must be joyful people whose hope is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the season of Lent is to help us uncover our joy, to strip away layers of sin and guilt that prevent us from experiencing and sharing the power of Christian hope. Through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, Lent helps us to clean house and to recover the roots of authentic Christian joy, so that we will be free to celebrate the Lord’s Resurrection at Easter and to share our joy with the whole world at Pentecost.

We are especially blessed in this Holy Year of Mercy to be able to reflect on the essential relationship between Christian optimism and our belief in God’s unconditional love and mercy. Scripture shows us, again and again, that there is no real hope for us as individuals or as communities without faith in a benevolent and merciful God. Christians are realistic. We acknowledge our sinfulness and the tendency toward corruption that exists in every social program no matter how well-intended or effectively designed.

We do not place our trust in princes (or politicians). We trust in the Lord. Christians believe that God humbled himself and became man in order to show us that true strength is not found simply in the absence of weakness. By his words and example, Jesus taught us that genuine love is never self-serving. Our hope is not in the strong man—or woman—who promises to liberate us from corrupt social systems. Our hope is in the One who provides us with the grace we need to change our hearts so that we can work together to change our world.

Christian optimism is realistic, not ideological. It focuses on virtues such as prudence, temperance, courage and justice. It relies on the spiritual values of faith, hope and charity, and it takes seriously our fallen human nature without ever questioning the power of God’s grace to heal us, make us whole again, and set us free.

This is the purpose of Christian asceticism: to help us open our hearts to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, who alone can liberate us from the burden of sin that weighs us down and blinds us to the truth about ourselves and our world.

Every year at this time, we celebrate the power of grace to dispel the dark shadows of death and despair. It’s no coincidence that Lent begins in winter and prepares us for the springtime of Easter. At this time of year, above all, we need to cultivate a realistic hope for the future.

This Lent, let’s turn off the nightly news and spend an hour meditating on the Way of the Cross. What we see reported every night is a world that has lost its way. Let’s walk with Jesus on a journey to the greatest act of love and mercy ever carried out by one human being for others—for us. Let’s discover Christian optimism in the hope of the Resurrection and in the joy of Easter.

—Daniel Conway

Reflection

Manning’s career shows that faithfulness in little things leads to greatness

Over the course of his 18 seasons in the National Football League, Peyton Manning put up big numbers. He completed the most passing touchdowns at 3,904. He set the NFL Most Valuable Player Awards at five. All of his impressive statistics are found in the history books when Manning announced his retirement during a press conference at Denver. Many fans in Indiana watched the press conference closely because of their fond memories of #18 from his 14 years leading the Indianapolis Colts, including taking them to a victory in Super Bowl XLI in 2007. Manning is also beloved by people across Indiana because of the way he contributed to the good of the community. Like the big numbers he put up in his football career, Manning made a difference when he provided millions for the construction of a health care facility for young people that now bears his name: Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital, which is on the campus of St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis.

Anyone can see that Manning truly remembers these tremendous accomplishments in athletics and philanthropy. But they all stand on the foundation of so many small things that Manning did from day to day that remains hidden from the public eye. The amazing passes that Manning completed to a host of receivers, that were thrown into the tightest of coverage, were made possible because of hours of practice and film study, which no one but Manning’s teammates and coaches ever saw.

In game situations, Manning was a master at examining the defense in the waning seconds before the snap of the football. He was an expert at picking up the defense and knowing that would turn him off to what the defense was going to do. It might be a cornerback turning his hips slightly in a safer moving way over so slightly upward toward the line of scrimmage.

Manning had become such a football genius he had the most relentless study of the game that he could notice these signs, process their meaning, decide in his mind what his team would do, and then effectively communicate a change in play to his 10 teammates, often in a matter of seconds filled with loud sounds, in the span of a few seconds.

The same principle also was at play in the way Manning gave back to the community. Underlying his massive public support of Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital are the countless other small acts of charity he’s made to hurting individuals and their families that no one ever knew about until the recipient came forward to tell his or her story.

As we give thanks for the great gift that Peyton Manning has been to football fans and the broader community over the past 18 years, and look forward to his continued contributions as he enters retirement, we can also learn a spiritual lesson from the example he has given us.

Building with the help of God’s grace a life of faith here and now worthy of the glory of heavens happen through daily fidelity to one’s calling, yes, even the smallest words, and acts of devotion to God that are often only seen by him.

None of us will have a Hall of Fame career like the one Manning just completed. But the reception he will receive when he enters the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, will be nothing compared to the welcome any of us will receive in heaven. So go out there and give each day your best shot with the help that God always provides.

(Sean Gallagher is a reporter for The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.)

Spirituality for Today

Fondness for a former first lady

The March 6 passing of Nancy Reagan saddened many Americans. I know it affected me more than I expected. She was an endearing smile and a quiet dignity. Everyone knew the role she played in the life of President Ronald Reagan, and how important she was to him. He claimed that his success was directly related to his presence in his life. He had faced a particularly bad year, including a long hospital stay. "And then along came Nancy Davis, and saved my soul," he is said to have told his biographer.

The bond between them was very affectionate. They shared the highest values of the human spirit in their unconditional love for each other. She was revered and despised in the press as First Lady of the White House. When she spoke, people knew that the president of the United States was solidly behind her. I met her at a fundraiser in 1980 during the campaign against President Jimmy Carter. It was at the Andover E. Smith Memorial Foundation dinner. She looked me straight in the eye, and she did that with everyone she met. At the time, all I could think of was her personal warmth.

What I saw in her and her husband was a deep spirituality and a humble dependence on God. They saw the president’s ascendency to the White House as the work of divine providence. Her death, and for that matter the death of anyone, can lead us to begin reflecting on the meaning of life. I’m thinking now about the meaning of Nancy Reagan’s life. She had her share of fame and glory, but I remember most about her was the love and devotion she and her husband had for each other.

She suffered mightily during the last two decades of her life. Think about it—she lived 12 more years after her husband’s death and was virtually alone. She cared for him for years before he died and when he was lost in the fog of Alzheimer’s disease. She suffered long and hard.

How bravely she carried her cross during those years, until death finally took her at the age of 94. In thinking of her, I’m reminded of a quote from Malcolm Muggeridge: "The same principle also was at play in all of its various guises; being known and being praised; ostensible pleasures, like acquisition of splendid homes and cars, drinking, going to and fro in the world and up and down in it like Satan, exploring and expressing any passing vanity Fair has to offer. . . . They are diversions designed to distract our attention from the true purpose of our lives. . . . The life Jesus Christ is herself, which is, quite simply, to look for God." Some people are not distracted, and Nancy Reagan was one of those who was not distracted. May she rest in eternal peace.

(Father John Catoir writes for Catholic News Service.)
Las obras piadosas como manifestaciones espirituales de la misericordia

La semana pasada escribí acerca de las obras de misericordia corporales como una forma de lograr que la misericordia sea algo tangible: compartir la comida y la bebida con los que tienen hambre y sed, vestir al desnudo y dar techo a quien no tiene hogar, visitar a los enfermos y a los presos, y enterrar a los difuntos.

Comenté que las palabras y el ejemplo de Jesús, que han inspirado las enseñanzas de los líderes de la Iglesia desde hace 2,000 años, constituyen el núcleo del discípulismo cristiano. Tal como lo expresa el papa Francisco, Jesús es el rostro de la misericordia y todos los cristianos tienen el desafío de hacer que la misericordia sea un elemento visible a través de acciones concretas.

Además de las obras de misericordia corporales, la Iglesia nos ofrece para reflexión y acción siete obras de misericordia espirituales. Estas son: enseñar al que no sabe, dar buen consejo al que no sabe, corregir al que se equivoca, sufrir con paciencia los defectos del prójimo, perdonar al que nos ofende, consolar al triste y rezar a Dios por los vivos y los difuntos.

La primera obra de misericordia espiritual es enseñar al que no sabe. Siempre va a existir algún aspecto sobre el cual no sepamos nada. Existen muchas cosas que desconocemos acerca de las maravillas de la creación de Dios, la historia de nuestra salvación y la riqueza de misericordia espirituales. Estas obras de misericordia corporales, la Iglesia nos ofrece para reflexión y acción siete obras de misericordia espirituales. Estas son: enseñar al que no sabe, dar buen consejo al que no sabe, corregir al que se equivoca, sufrir con paciencia los defectos del prójimo, perdonar al que nos ofende, consolar al triste y rezar a Dios por los vivos y los difuntos.

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If using the online form is not an option, please send events information to: The Criterion, Events Calendar, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202, or fax it to 317-236-1593. Please be sure to include the date, time, and where it will take place, cost if applicable, a brief description of the event, and contact information both for publication and if The Criterion staff needs clarification.

Event information must be received by 5 p.m. on the Thursday two weeks prior to the desired publication date.

There is no charge to events in the Events Calendar.

For questions or submitting events, call the office at 317-236-1585, or toll free at 800-382-9836, ext. 1585.

Divorce and Beyond will offer six-meeting session to run April 12-May 17

Divorce and Beyond will be offered on consecutive Tuesdays at the Archdiocese T. O’Meara Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, from 7-9 p.m. from April 12 to May 17. The topics for discussion will be the process of divorce, self-image, stress, anger, blame, guilt, loneliness and forgiveness.

The cost of the six-week session is $30, which includes a book. For more information or to register, contact the Pro-Life and Family Life Office at 317-236-1586 or e-mail dyanveler@archindy.org.

Annunciation Parish will offer Good Friday service

Annunciation Parish, 19 N. Alabama St., in Brackenridge, will offer a Good Friday Tenebrae Service at 8 p.m. on Saturday, “Tenebrae (Latin for ‘shadows’ or ‘darkness’)” is a service distinctive for its gradual extinguishing of candles, while a series of readings and psalms is chanted or recited. The service, most often held on Good Friday during Holy Week, was more common before Vatican II liturgical reforms but is making a resurgence.

This service will be performed by the parish’s St. Ambrose Schola Cantorum. This professional sacred musical ensemble sings instrumental, choral, organ, and modern eras, Gregorian and Ambrosian chants, psalms and classic hymns. The evening is free and open to all.

For more information, contact Edward Atkinson at 812-448-1901.

Iraqi ambassador to speak on the future of Iraq at Marian University on March 31

Ambassador Salih al-Ibrahim al-Najafi of Iraq will present a talk on “The Future of Iraq” at the Michael A. Edelweiss Center for Global Studies Speaker Series on March 31 at 11:15 a.m. The lecture will take place in the Catholic Campus Ministry Center’s St. Mary-of-the-Woods Conference Room. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, e-mail maple@marian.edu or call 317-955-6775.

Sisters of Providence offer Come and See weekend on April 8-10

The Sister of Providence invite all single Catholic women ages 18-42 to learn more about becoming a Sister of Providence during their “Come and See” weekend retreat at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from 7 p.m. on April 8 to 2 p.m. on April 10. During the retreat, participants will have the chance to meet informally with new members of the Sisters of Providence, get to know the spirituality and mission of the sisters, find individualized support for their discernment journey, and meet and share experiences with other women also considering religious life.

There is no charge for the event, and meals will be provided. Those interested in attending are asked to register.

For more information, call Providence Sister Edith Ben at 812-230-4771, e-mail edith_ben@spsmw.org, or register online at ComeandSee.SistersofProvidence.org.

Programs and Retreats

Annunciation Parish, 19 N. Alabama St., in Brackenridge, will offer a Good Friday Tenebrae Service at 8 p.m. on March 25. The service will be performed by the parish’s St. Ambrose Schola Cantorum. This professional sacred musical ensemble sings instrumental, choral, organ, and modern eras, Gregorian and Ambrosian chants, psalms and classic hymns. The evening is free and open to all.

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For more information, call Providence Sister Edith Ben at 812-230-4771, e-mail edith_ben@spsmw.org, or register online at ComeandSee.SistersofProvidence.org.
Lenten penance services are scheduled at archdiocesan parishes

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Lent. The following list of services was reported to The Criterion.

Batesville Deaconery
• March 16, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Brookville

Bloomington Deaconery
• March 15, 7 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford
• March 16, 6:30-8 p.m. at St. Jude the Apostle, Spencer
• March 17, 6 p.m. at St. John the Apostle, Bloomington
• March 23, 4 p.m. at St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington East Parish

Connorsville Deaconery
• March 15, 7 p.m. at Richmond Catholic Community at St. Mary, Richmond
• March 16, 7 p.m. at St. Anne, New Castle

Indianapolis East Deaconery
• March 12, 1-3 p.m. at St. Michael, Greenfield
• March 14, 7 p.m. for Holy Angels and St. Rita at St. Rita Parish
• March 15, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Indianapolis
• March 17, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas the Apostle, Fortville

Indianapolis South Deaconery
• March 13, 2 p.m. at Good Shepherd
• March 15, 7 p.m. for St. Mark the Evangelist and St. Roch at St. Roch
• March 21, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood

Indianapolis West Deaconery
• March 15, 6:30 p.m. for St. Anthony and St. Christopher at St. Anthony
• March 16, 7 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel
• March 17, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas More, Mooresville

New Albany Deaconery
• March 15, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, New Albany (“12 Hours of Grace”)
• March 16, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Navilent
• March 20, 10 a.m. at St. John the Baptist, Starlight
• 5:45-6:15 p.m. each Wednesday in Lent at St. Mary, New Albany
• 6:30-8:30 p.m. each Wednesday in Lent at Holy Family, Charlestown
• 7-8:30 p.m. each Wednesday in Lent at St. Mary, Lanesville
• 6:30-8:30 p.m. each Wednesday in Lent at St. Michael, New Albany
• 6:30-8:30 p.m. each Thursday in Lent at St. Francis Xavier, Henryville

Seymour Deaconery
• March 13, 4:30 p.m. at St. Patrick, Salem, and American Martyrs, Scotsburn at American Martyrs, Scotsburn

Tell City Deaconery
• Every Wednesday in Lent, and March 30, 3:30 p.m. central time, eucharistic adoration; 3:45 p.m., confessions; 4:30 p.m., Mass. at St. Meinrad in St. Meinrad

Terre Haute Deaconery
• March 16, 7 p.m. at Sacred Heart, Clinton
• March 16, 7 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute (“The Light is on for You”)
• March 23, 7:30 p.m. at Annunciation, Brazil (every Wednesday in Lent 7:30-9 p.m.)
• March 23, 7 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute (“The Light is on for You”)
• Every Monday in Lent 6-7:30 p.m. at St. Paul the Apostle, Greeneville
• Every Wednesday in Lent 7-8 p.m. at St. Joseph University Parish, Terre Haute

Lenten activities available online
Be sure to visit The Criterion’s Lenten Web page at www.archindy.org/ent
The page consists of links to daily readings, archived Lenten columns by Archbishop Emeritus Daniel M. Burke, a full list of communal penance services taking place at parishes and other features.
ABORTION
continued from page 1

centers and their doctors to have admitting privileges at local hospitals.
Opponents of the state regulations say they are aimed at stopping abortions because they did not have admitting privileges at a hospital in the same metropolitan area. The measures would have made it impossible to perform an abortion in the state if the court upheld the law. If the law is fully enforced, the biggest impact will be in the western and southern parts of the state. Currently, a temporary court order allows one clinic in the Rio Grande Valley to remain open while the case is pending. Last year, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans largely upheld the law, so if the Supreme Court justices are tied 4-4 in their decision, it will uphold the lower court’s decision and affect the three states—Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana—covered by the appeal, not setting a national precedent.

During the arguments last year before the appeals court, the solicitor general representing Texas said the state’s law didn’t place an “undue burden” on women who wanted an abortion because as he put it: “The undue burden has to require something more than driving more distance, people will always have to travel to get an abortion.”

Justice Stephen Breyer, Stephanie Toti, the plaintiff’s attorney, emphasized that the law placed an undue burden on women, particularly in West Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. “If a woman in El Paso has to travel 500 miles to get an abortion, that’s an undue burden,” she said.

The issue was still front and center in the March 2 arguments. Justice Elena Kagan said the law could destroy the ability of hundreds of thousands of women who would have to travel much farther to reach a clinic. Chief Justice John Roberts, a Texas native, said the major metropolitan areas in the state that currently have clinics would continue to have them. He also noted that more than 90 percent of Texas women live within 150 miles of an abortion clinic.

The law puts “heavy burdens on abortion access that are not medically justified,” argued Toti, a lawyer for the Center for Reproductive Rights in New York City, referring to clinics that have closed throughout the state just prior to the law’s enactment or right afterward.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports legal abortion, 25 states have laws or policies that regulate abortion providers and clinics that perform them, which in the court’s view, go beyond what is necessary to ensure patients’ safety.

Five states currently require providers of either medication or surgical abortion services to have admitting privileges at a local hospital, and another 10, including Indiana, require the local hospital to maintain a relationship with a hospital. In Texas, there is a new restriction that only requires medication abortion providers to maintain admitting privileges or another type of relationship with a hospital. In California, there is a new regulation that includes a requirement for surgical abortion providers.

Allan in her statement said the “real question before the court in this case is whether women deserve access to abortion, but rather women deserve safe medical procedures.”

How the Supreme Court will rule on the case remains to be seen.

Clarke Forsythe, acting president and senior counsel at Americans United for Life, said the court could either reach a 4-4 vote, hold a decision for a later date or send it back to the trial court, which Kennedy mentioned during the oral argument.

Based on the argument, it did not seem that the abortion clinics would get 5 votes on any ground,” he said in a March 2 statement. And based on how the court rules, the battle over this issue will likely continue. As he put it: “We are certainly going to find ourselves in court again arguing over laws to protect women in abortion clinics from immediate and long-term risks.”

What was in the news on March 11, 1966? Ecumenism in Great Britain, a draft birth control commission in Rome, the value of Catholic schools

By Brandon A. Evans

This week, we continue to examine what was going on in the Church and the world 50 years ago as seen through the eyes of The Criterion.

Here are some of the items found in the March 11, 1966, issue of The Criterion.

• Why ecumenism is lagging badly among British Hibernians will strut up boulevard of green bands

The Roman Catholic Church is ‘guilty of genocide, and it is time we speak the truth about their atrocities. I hope the administration and the world will do the same, before it’s too late.’

Supreme Knight Carl Anderson issued a statement applauding the House Foreign Affairs Committee for taking “a courageous and historic step in giving meaning to the words ‘never again.’”

We now look forward to passage by the full House of Representatives, which has the opportunity to be on the right side of history in a bipartisan manner, joining its voice to those of the European Parliament, Pope Francis, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom and prominent genocide scholars worldwide.

The Knights of Columbus, based in New Haven, Conn., and the Washington-based group In Defense of Christians are currently sponsoring an online petition (www.ThirtyThirty.org) urging Secretary of State John Kerry not to exclude Christians from a declaration of genocide at the hands of the Islamic state.

“America must end its silence about the ongoing genocide against Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria,” says the petition, launched on Feb. 25 and being promoted with a new national TV ad. So far, the petition has garnered more than 56,000 signatures.

Introduced by Rep. Chris Smith, R-New Jersey, the second resolution OK’d by the House committee “strongly condemns the gross violations of international law amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity by the government of Syria, its allies and other parties to the conflict in Syria; and calls on the [U.S.] president to promote the establishment of a Syrian war crimes tribunal.”

The previous statement noted that prior to the vote on the second measure, the committee “heard searing testimony regarding the terrible atrocities being committed by Syria’s government against its own people—widespread torture, industrial-scale murder, starvation, as a tool of war and the terror of unleashing barrel bombs.”

And more than 800,000 have been killed, and millions more have been forced from their homes in Syria’s civil war that began with the aim of overthrowing Assad.

By Peter W. deLay

A pro-life supporter holds up a sign in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington on March 2 on the 45th anniversary of Roe v. Wade to protest in a challenge to a Texas law imposing new standards on abortion clinics and requiring abortion doctors to have hospital admitting privileges.

(Chris Keane/WashPost, Pool)
Massgoers urged to be open to Lord’s mercy, ‘be instruments of it’

WASHINGTON (CNS)—The “annual retreat” for the Archdiocese of Seattle was an “opportunity moment to re-establish the Lord” as the center of one’s life, and quiet time spent in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is a chance to really listen to what God is saying, Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio said in a homily on March 3.

“We must be attentive,” he said, even “when the Gospel seems demanding, out of touch, or opposed to our desires, apparent gain or whatever.”

The archbishop, who heads the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, was the main celebrant at an early evening Mass in the Crypt Church at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington to open the shrine’s observance of “24 Hours for Lord,” a worldwide Holy Year of Mercy project initiated by Pope Francis.

At the Vatican, in Rome and in many dioceses around the world—including several parishes in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis—Catholic churches had extended hours for confessions as part of the project.

In Washington, a 48-hour period for the observance was scheduled at the national shrine, with continuous exposition of the Blessed Sacrament throughout that time, including overnight hours. An early evening closing Mass on March 5 was celebrated by Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Va., followed by a eucharistic procession.

Archbishop Broglio told the more than 200 people attending the opening Mass they were gathered at a most appropriate place to mark “this special day of mercy” proclaimed by the pope, because the national shrine is “a place of constant healing where priests are available to administer divine pardon to those who seek it.”

He opened his homily by sharing an article often used by best-selling author Matthew Kelly to illustrate the importance of the eucharist.

“The story is of a mysterious fatal infection spreading around the world, devastating populations, forcing physicians and scientists to work “night and day to find an antitode.” Archbishop Broglio said.

“One day they find a young boy who has a natural immunity that could produce a vaccine. His parents are told their son could save the world, but that he must make the ultimate sacrifice—his life.

“The parents are beside themselves, but they see there is no choice,” the archbishop

People pray before the Blessed Sacrament after the opening Mass for ‘24 Hours for the Lord’ at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington on March 3. (CNS photo/Jaclyn Lippelmann, Catholic Standard)

Get thee to a confessional: Pope Francis goes, and wants you to as well

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Go to confession. Soon.

For Pope Francis, the Holy Year of Mercy is all about sharing the experience of God’s mercy with others. But first, he wants people to experience it themselves, in the confessional.

Lent is the perfect time for that kind of spring cleaning of the soul. But that does not mean penitents should approach the sacrament of penance as an innocent exercise.

The pope repeatedly has told priests that in the confessional they should ask only questions that help penitents recognize their sins rather than conducting “a penitential interrogation.”

“Sometimes when you’re in line for confession, you feel all sorts of things, especially shame, but when your confession is over, you’ll leave free, great, beautiful, forgiven, clean, happy—this is what’s beautiful about confession,” he said.

In the recent book-length interview, The Name of God Is Mercy, Pope Francis also spoke about confession as an important means of helping people to be truly honest before God. “It’s a way to be real and authentic,” he said. “We face the facts by looking at another person and not in the mirror.”

The pope has said he would be willing to travel to other countries to assist penitents and “engage” with them, if it means that other priests are already working there.

In The Name of God Is Mercy, the pope was asked how one should prepare for confession. His answer: “He ought to reflect on the truth of his life, of what he feels and what he thinks before God. He ought to be able to look earnestly at himself and his sin. He ought to feel like a sinner, so that he can be amazed by God.”

As he said in December 2014, “Go to confession to clean up a bit. This is good for you.”

Father Bryan Dolezal, vocation director for the Archdiocese of Seattle, wears a boy’s confession in Kent, Wash., in this on July 22, 2014, file photo. (CNS photo/Alex Parfitt, NorthWest Catholic magazine)
Lawmakers pass bill to expand Individual Development Accounts

By Brigid Curtis Ayer

Indiana lawmakers passed legislation to assist low-income families by expanding a savings plan program created under Individual Development Accounts or IDAs. The Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) supports the legislation. Senate Bill 325, the IDA enhancement bill, passed unanimously on third reading in the Indiana House of Representatives on Feb. 23, and is headed to Gov. Mike Pence’s desk for approval.

The measure, authored by State Sen. Mark Messmer, R-Rippon, aims to improve the state’s IDA program by ensuring more individuals can take advantage of this resource by increasing the maximum eligibility from 175 percent to 200 percent of the federal income poverty level guidelines. For a family of four, the income eligibility for IDAs would increase to $48,600 annually.

“IDA help low-income Hoosiers build assets, attain self-sufficiency, learn personal finances skills, and improve their quality of life,” Messmer said.

According to Messmer, Indiana has been a national leader of IDAs since 1997 when it was one of two states in the U.S. to pass legislation which created a statewide IDA program before the federal legislation took shape. The program was instrumental in working with lawmakers to get the initial IDA plan passed.

In this program, non-profit organizations assist low-income individuals open a matching savings account at a ratio of three to one, helping individuals to save toward the purchase of lifelong assets, such as a home.

“Every dollar saved, the IDA participants can obtain a three dollar match on their deposit, up to $900 per year,” Messmer said.

Participants can only use the matching funds if they follow through on financial education and a goal setting plan offered by the IDA administering organization.

Currently under the program, IDA participants can receive financial management support, including financial literacy courses and assistance in planning for a business, attaining higher education or buying a home. The IDA bill allows participants to use IDA funds to purchase a vehicle when used as transportation to adult or secondary educational opportunities.

“This would give low-income Hoosiers more options to utilize this program in order to help them enter the financial mainstream,” Messmer said.

The 1997 IDA legislation was authored by two Indianapolis lawmakers who are now retired. State Rep. John Day, a Democrat, and State Rep. Mike Murphy, a Republican, who are both Catholic. The bill gained bipartisan support, and was passed as part of the state budget.

Messmer said that while the changes to the IDA program may seem modest, the impact on those in the community is substantial. He said that by raising the income threshold to 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines, more low-income residents will be eligible to receive asset goal education, credit repair education, and monthly check-ins with dedicated non-profit organizations’ staff.

He said the bill takes an important step forward in removing an impediment—transportation—for low-income individuals to maintain employment.

Messmer added that in Indiana, the vast majority of hard-working people require a vehicle to obtain and maintain steady employment.

Testimony earlier during the session revealed that employers’ site transportation difficulties were one of the main reasons they lose entry-level workers. Many urban and rural areas of the state are underserved with regard to public transportation. In those areas where there is adequate public transportation, the schedules or bus line routes are not always reliable for workers to sustain their employment with their proximity to affordable housing.

This makes it difficult for workers supporting themselves or their families to keep a steady job.

Messmer said that Senate Bill S25 responds to this impediment by expanding the savings option to allow a vehicle purchase.

Andrew Bradley, senior policy analyst for the Indiana Institute for Working Families, spoke in support of the legislation. He said that purchasing and maintaining a vehicle can require upward of 25 percent of the IDA participant’s income.

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Glenn Tebbe, executive director of the ICC, who serves as the legislative and public policy spokesperson for the Church in Indiana, said, “The ICC has had a long history of supporting programs that assist low-income, working individuals provide for their families and work toward self-sufficiency.”

—Glenn Tebbe, executive director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

Pope Francis tells corrupt benefactors that Church doesn’t need ‘dirty money’

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Speaking to an audience of hundreds of faithful at his general audience in St. Peter’s Square, the pope said he would tell these donors to correct his sinning children.

“I am thinking of many, many refugees who are landing in Europe and don’t know where to go,” he said.

“We must deliver them to a country which will give them hospitality,” he said.

“Correct your sinning children. Where to go, he said. ‘They who come with an offering,” he said, and added, “affectionate, but also an alert and strict father.”

God wants people to turn away from bitterness and disappointment in order to love again,” the pope said. "I am thinking of many, many refugees who are landing in Europe and don’t know where to go,” he said.

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At general audience, the pope continued a series of talks dedicated to the Year of Mercy by focusing on how God is able to unconditionally love, bless and correct his sinning children.

Just like the father of a family, God cares for his people by teaching them, guiding them to freely choose the good and help others, and correcting them when they make a mistake.

The prophet Isaiah presents God as an “affectatone, but also an alert and strict father,” the pope said.

God points out the infidelity and corruption of his people, and shows his bitterness and disappointment in order to help them recognize their sin and “bring them back to the path of justice,” he said.

Even though he is hurt, God lets love do the talking and he appeals to the conscience of these degenerate children so that they rethink their ways and let themselves be loved again,” the pope said.
The world’s vast deserts enjoy a reputation as arid, harsh, inhospitable places. Nonetheless, millions of people rather happily inhabit desert regions. Still, a familiar image from the annals of literature and films quickly comes to mind when the word “desert” is heard. It is an image of fearsome places where a person might well become hopelessly lost, and where thirst and sandstorms prevail. Increasing the size of our geographical deserts is no one’s goal, I suppose. But it is the increasing size of deserts of another kind that has concerned recent popes. These deserts mirror the arid, dry qualities of the planet’s geographical deserts, and they represent a major concern in Lent. They are called “internal deserts.” They stake our claim with people’s lives, proving harmful to them and expanding their reach into the surrounding world. That is why Pope Francis expresses concern about them in “Laudato Si’,” On Care for Our Common Home,” his 2015 encyclical on the environment. “The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast,” the encyclical states, quoting Pope Benedict XVI (#217). In his 2005 inaugural homily, Pope Benedict said that because internal deserts “have become so vast,” the vast treasures of the Earth “no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction.” Pope Francis fears that “violence present” in human hearts gives rise to “the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life” (#2). With his encyclical, he hopes to motivate Christians to “a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (#216). He strikingly affirms that “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue, it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (#217). Does it sound strange to hear care for the environment described that way, as a key concern for Christians? Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, discussed this in a Jan. 27 speech prepared for the International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu, Philippines. The sacraments are central in the life of the church. But central to the celebration of the sacraments are the good things of the Earth. Cardinal Turkson pointed out. He said, “A premise of the celebration of sacramental liturgy is that we use the good things from this Earth to worship God.” Among these good things are the bread and wine brought to the altar for every eucharistic celebration. “Every time we take bread and wine in the act of doing the Eucharist, we articulate the theology of the goodness of creation,” the cardinal remarked. In fact, he indicated, “God’s goodness is the source of the things of this Earth used in liturgy.” Moreover, “through sacramental liturgy, human persons put their lives and the world itself into proper perspective.” A proper perspective on the world for Pope Francis reveals that believers “do not look at the world from without but from within” (#220). This perspective encompasses an awareness “of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings,” the encyclical emphasizes (#220). Bearing in mind the internal deserts that inhabit and inhibit the lives of individuals and communities, Pope Francis concludes in “Laudato Si’” that the contemporary “ecological crisis” also delivers “a summons to profound interior conversion” (#217). When we are enriched inwardly, in other words, we will be able to interact better with other people, including the poor, and with the world itself. Wasteful habits and overconsumption of the Earth’s resources then will be addressed, and efforts will be undertaken to counteract “the throwaway culture that affects the entire planet” (#22). Throughout Christian history, Lent always was viewed as a time for conversion, a time for a change of heart that clears the way to a life that is more compassionate, generous and committed to Christ’s ways of expressing love, as witnessed in the Gospels. Today, however, “an ecological conversion” also deserves to find a place in our spirituality. Pope Francis believes. “We come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion,” he explains in “Laudato Si’” (#218). He observes that “some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent” (#215). What is needed, therefore, is “an ecological conversion,” whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them,” Pope Francis stresses (#217). But more than individual conversions will be required. “Social problems must be addressed by community networks,” Pope Francis makes clear (#219). Thus, ecological conversion must also become “a community conversion” (#219). For Pope Francis, the Earth itself today “is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (#2). His firm wish is that “an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems” (#220). (David Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years.)
Renaissance Church: Start of the Protestant Reformation

From the Editor Emeritus

Cynthia Dewes

Hey, are you paying attention, are you listening?

I find events from the past interesting. My father was not my father before him. My father was not a shoe salesman. He was a scientist. On some level, despite our family's origins in the Mayflower. It was a timeline unknown to me, a special campaign to sell indulgences to Roman Catholic Church.

But how does it relate to our personal lives? To answer that question, you can look to their calendar on a regular basis. It's a reminder that there is more to life than whatever we get by looking at an empty calendar.

There is no point in notizing sports venues, either. Think of TV shows like the one the autobiography of a special campaign to sell indulgences to the pope was willing—for a price. Albrecht demanded by Rome. He took the name Pope Leo X.

In 1517, a German nobleman, Margrave Albrecht of Brandenburg, approached Pope Leo about becoming the archbishop of Mainz. Albrecht was his father before him. My father was not a shoe salesman. He was a scientist. On some level, despite our family's origins in the Mayflower. It was a timeline unknown to me, a special campaign to sell indulgences to the pope was willing—for a price. Albrecht demanded by Rome. He took the name Pope Leo X.
Sunday Readings

• Isaiah 43:16-21
• Philippians 3:8-14
• John 8:1-11

The first reading for this weekend in Lent is from the prophet Isaiah. When it was written, God’s people were facing many trials and tribulations. It was a bittersweet moment. After several generations of living in exile in Babylon, the people were free to return to their homeland; thanks to a change in political power in the region.

It was a time for which these people, and their parents or grandparents, had yearned for.

However, their historic homeland was sterile and desolate, hardly the land overflowing with milk and honey that God promised Moses. It was anything but a place of security and plenty.

People were frightened and despondent. It is easy to imagine the cynicism with which this prophet had to contend. It is easy to imagine the angry remarks of many of the people that God at long last had provided them with the freedom to go back home, but look at the home that God had prepared for them!

With his customary eloquence and directness, Isaiah insists that, in the end, God will make all things right. He will direct us to a place of security and plenty. God promised Moses. It was anything but the circumstances may seem to be.

For the second reading, the Church presents a passage from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians. The Christians of Philippi were few in number by comparison, and their devotion to Christ made them more an exception in the Church than a rule. St. Paul encouraged and challenged these Christians. Strong in its message, the Epistle to the Philippians. The Christians in Philippi were a special people. (If an adulterous woman conceived outside her marriage and gave birth to the child, concealing the child’s true paternity, then the family’s identity would be compromised, and more broadly, the identity of the Chosen People might be in jeopardy.)

Yet, fearlessly, Jesus rescued the woman by forgiving her, admonishing her not to sin again, and reminding all of their own sinfulness.

Reflection

Only two weeks of Lent remain, but there is time to take advantage of this penitential season. Lent calls us first to recognize our sins, to repent of them and then to devote ourselves to God.

Essential to the process is the difficult task of admitting that we have sinned. The admission exposes our lack of wisdom, and it reminds us that we have harmed ourselves, perhaps mortally. We must acknowledge our limitation.

The Lord’s admonition to the woman guilty of such an awful offense shows that no matter the evil of a person’s ways, anyone can change with God’s help. God’s help awaits our request just as Jesus extended it to her.

Holy Week nears. The Church in these readings contrasts life and death in dramatic terms, so that God’s mercy will be put before us during Holy Week.

The Church implores us, come to God!

Daily Readings

Monday, March 14
Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62
Psalm 23:1-6
John 8:12-20

Tuesday, March 15
Numbers 21:4-9
Psalm 102:2-3, 16-21
John 8:21-30

Wednesday, March 16
Daniel 9:11-20, 91-92, 95
(Responsory) Daniel 3:52-56
John 8:31-42

Thursday, March 17
St. Patrick, bishop
Genesis 17:3-9
Psalm 105:4-9
John 8:51-59

CNS Saints

Patrick
c. 389-461 ¶ March 17

The patron of Ireland, this bishop was born in Roman Britain, kidnapped at 16 by Irish raiders and sold into slavery in Ireland. He was a lonely shepherd for six years before escaping and returning home. But his dream of converting the Irish pagans propelled him to priestly studies in Gaul (now France), and about 452 Pope Celestine I consecrated him bishop and sent him to Ireland. For nearly 30 years he preached tirelessly, made countless converts, founded monasteries and established the primatial see at Armagh. Toward the end of his life he made a 40-day retreat in Mayo that gave rise to the famous ongoing Crough Patrick pilgrimages. Stories of him using the shamrock to explain the Trinity and driving snakes from the island are legend.

Question Corner

Fr. Kenneth Doyle

Those who fast on
Ash Wednesday, Good Friday are united with Christ, his suffering

On the two obligatory days of fasting—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—I do fast, but I get very hungry during the latter part of the day. So I sometimes wait until just after midnight, and then satisfy my hunger with an amount of food not in keeping with the notion of fasting.

While I believe that I am meeting the letter of my obligation, I am not sure that I am honoring its spirit. What sort of guidance would you offer?

(New Jersey)

A
The Catholic Church, it seems to me, is rather modest in the dietary discipline it asks from its faithful. As you note, there are only two days of fasting on the Church’s calendar: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days, Catholics are to limit themselves to only one full (and meatless) meal.

Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times, but that food (combined) should not equal a full meal. Liquids are permitted at any time, but no solid food should be taken between meals.

The discipline of fasting governs only those between the ages of 18 and 59, and it does not apply to anyone for whom it might create a health risk—for example, the sick or the frail, or pregnant or nursing women.

We fast, of course, to unite ourselves to Christ and to the burdens he endured on our behalf. Logically, then, this fasting should result in some sacrifice on our part.

In your case, I believe that you are being faithful to the letter and the spirit of the law (assuming that after midnight you are not being gluttonous). The fact that you do struggle later in the day means that you do struggle something—not to mention the fact that you need to stay up so late to satisfy your hunger!

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St. Albany, N.Y. 12208. ¶)

My Journey to God

Where do I stand?

How close do I get?

By Cathy Lamperski Dearing

Am I close enough so He can wash my feet?
Where do I stand at the Cross?

Am I right alongside Mary and John?
Where am I when the stone is rolled away?

Do I run to the tomb where only shroud and cloth remain?
Where do I stand at the Cross?

Am I close enough to see?
Where do I stand?

Do I get very hungry during the day?
What sort of guidance would you offer?

(Kathy Lamperski Dearing is a member of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis. A woman gazes at a statue of Christ crucified at the Shrine of Christ’s Passion in St. John, Ind., in the Gary Diocese, on April 2, 2015.) (Photo by Natalie Hostet)

Friday, March 18
St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop and doctor of the Church
Jeremiah 20:10-13
Psalm 18:2-7
John 10:31-42

Saturday, March 19
St. Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary
2 Samuel 7:5-5a, 12-14a, 16
Psalm 89:2-5, 7, 27
Romans 4:13, 16-18. 22
Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a

Sunday, March 20
Paul, Sunday of the Passion of the Lord
Isaiah 50:4-7
Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
Philippians 2:6-11

The Criterion Friday, March 11, 2016
Chinese pilgrim

A Chinese Catholic carries a crucifix during a pilgrimage in the Shaanxi province in central China. (AP photo/We Hong, EPA)
Thousands celebrate God’s ‘boundless mercy’ at Religious Ed Congress

ANAPAHEM, Calif. (CNS)—At the closing Mass, before thousands of people who attended the 2016 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress held at the Anaheim Convention Center in California, the congress president, Sr. Helen Maderia, F.S.W., told those who gathered: “We can trust God because we can trust Jesus,” the archbishop said in his homily at a Mass for more than 12,000 young Catholics on Feb. 25 at the congress’s Youth Day, which was followed by three more days of sessions. “Jesus is real. You can trust your life to him and find joy and peace, that joy and peace that we’re all looking for.”

The theme for this year’s Religious Education Congress, echoed throughout the weekend, was “Boundless Mercy,” inspired by the Sunday’s Gospel and Pope Francis’ declaration of the Holy Year of Mercy. Sister Helen, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Mary, said the event’s keynote speaker, addressed the need for mercy in her work to end the death penalty.

“One of the reasons we’re begging to put the death penalty down in this country is we have warlords testifying,” she said. “I didn’t get into this job to kill people. I’m in the one who has to officiate at these deaths.”

“California, the average wait is 25 years,” she added.

“The warlords among us, they are the ones calling us as a society, as a nation to end the death penalty.”

Ansel Augustine, the Youth Day keynote speaker, performed with his troop of dancers from New Orleans.

“Even though we know he’s real, we sometimes forget that he’s always there,” he said about God. “He’s waiting for us to turn back to him.”

Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.J.

At the closing Mass, concelebrated with Bishop Mark D. Seitz, auxiliary bishop of El Paso, Texas, Augustine said, “I am somebody, but I am everybody in some exquisite way. I am part of Dolores Mission in Los Angeles. At the time, the parish was in a neighborhood with the highest concentration of gang violence.”

“The Gospel in the end doesn’t lead me to think that God is going to abandon me or the community we’re in. ‘Unity is a gift God has given us, but it is sometimes lacking in our lives because we haven’t participated in it,’ he said. “It’s a great gift that requires our response.”

“The most direct way to get to God, Yzaguirre said, is to do God’s will. He recommended seven things to help individuals of God. Keep reasonable work hours; develop good friendships; deepen union with God; take care of physical health; foster unity in the family; learn constantly; and serve the community.”

“I can’t imagine a way that I could have learned the tenderness of God better than through these men and women I’ve come to know,” he said of the ex-gang members that he employs through Homeboy.

“Our personal experiences tell us that God wants to be close and unite and whispering in our ear,” he said. “Our God is exhausted loving us, too loving us to ever be disappointed in us.”

“Jesus promises us that if we follow him, follow his teachings, we will know happiness and joy,” Archbishop Gomez said. “And we will live forever, even after we’re done living here on Earth. That’s his promise.”

More than 40,000 participants gather on Feb. 24 during the 2016 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress held at the Anaheim Convention Center in California. (CNS photo/Victor Alosmen)
Catholic Navy SEAL given Medal of Honor for heroic action

WASHINGTON (CNS)—A Catholic Navy SEAL, with a strong devotion to St. Michael the Archangel, was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama at the White House on Feb. 29.

The 36-year-old Ohio native, Senior Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward C. Byers Jr., rescued a civilian hostage in a remote area of eastern Afghanistan in December 2012.

At the White House ceremony, Obama introduced Byers, calling him a “special breed of warrior that so often serves in the shadows.”

The nation’s highest military honor was awarded to Byers for, as a military aide read, “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a Hostage Rescue Team member in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom [on Dec. 8-9, 2012].”

The Washington Post and other news outlets reported that Byers, who is assigned to the SEAL teams based in Little Creek, Virginia, said that for years he has prayed to St. Michael the Archangel, drawing strength from the saint described in Scripture as the one who defends the people of God from their enemies.

Byers was quoted by The Post as saying that during a career of serving in combat, he has always worn a St. Michael the Archangel patch “on my back. ... Every single mission I’ve ever done. I’ve always said a prayer to St. Michael to protect and watch over us.”

During the Medal of Honor presentation, a military aide described the heroism of Byers: “[He] fearlessly rushed into the room and engaged an enemy guard aiming an AK-47 at him. He then tackled another adult male who had darted toward the corner of the room. During the ensuing hand-to-hand struggle, Chief Byers confirmed the man was not the hostage and engaged him. As the other rescue team members called out to the hostage, Chief Byers heard a voice respond in English and raced toward it.

He jumped atop the American hostage and shielded him from the high volume of fire within the small room.”

While he covered the hostage with his body, the aide continued. Byers “immobilized another guard with his bare hands, and restrained the guard until a teammate could eliminate him.”

“His bold and decisive actions under fire saved the lives of the hostage and several of his teammates. By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion in duty in the face of near-certain death, Chief Petty Officer Byers reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

According to reports, Byers is the sixth Navy SEAL in history to be awarded the Medal of Honor, and the first living SEAL to receive the honor since the Vietnam War.

Byers has demonstrated “true heroism,” and his actions “will continue to inspire all of those who love our country and serve it so selflessly,” said Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.

“It is obvious that his patriotism and prayer are motivated by his strong Catholic faith. May his story join the chorus of those who are praising this SEAL and all of his fellows,” the archbishop said in a March 2 statement.

Byers also has two Purple Hearts for wounds suffered in combat and five Bronze Stars with V device for heroism.

In Obama’s introduction of Byers’ family, he welcomed his wife, Madison, his daughter, Hannah, and Byers’ mother, Peggy.

Obama relayed that she “had one question when Ed told her about this ceremony—’Do you think I can come?’ That’s so sweet. Yes, Mom, you’re allowed to come when your son gets the Medal of Honor,” Obama said.†