

# The heartbeat in Times Square

Recently I've been spending my Friday evenings praying in front of the Eucharist in the chapel at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in lower Manhattan. The area is a bit of a hub for bars and nightlife, so I overhear many a passing conversation while there. Never before did I notice how often people say the name of the Lord as an expression of all kinds of emotion and emphasis – even filler. Little did they know who was on the other side of the wall.

We were praying in reparation for what happens on the other side of another wall of the center, at Planned Parenthood next door, and for recent abortion expansion laws in the Empire State. We need the power of God's healing love big-time in New York.

I thought of this during the pro-life rally, Alive from New York, hosted by Focus on the Family in Times Square earlier this month – an event that is being dubbed the biggest pro-life event in New York history. I confess, at first I had mixed feelings about the rally. Emcees had to wear bulletproof vests at the request of the New York Police Department. A man passed by on a bike and shouted that we were not welcome in New York, echoing the sentiments of the governor. The counterprotesters came through and found their spot. And I looked up and saw a Planned Parenthood ad in pink on the Thomson/Reuters screen. This just didn't feel right. Even the gray skies an hour before didn't seem to welcome the event.

But do you know what our crowd did, without any organizational prompting, in the face of the hostility? Prayed. And, with a loving reverence, they started spelling out the name of Jesus. This was the counterproposal to a culture of death. Jesus.

I confess, too, that I had to listen carefully for a moment. I can't remember an event where I heard the name of the Lord

spelled out so clearly and lovingly like that. And, yet, there they were, proclaiming the name of the Lord. Not to make a political point, but to let his name be heard. That was their counterproposal in a state that has doubled down on death this year.

From the stage, the themes were life, love, mercy and conversion. Speakers prayed for those who do not see the life in the womb as life. Speakers asked the Holy Spirit to move mountains and for divine mercy to melt away the wounds that are obstacles to healing. For anyone who listened, there was no doubt about where these people were coming from: the frontlines of love – a front to which we're all called in more radical ways. Ashley Bratcher, the actress who plays Abby Johnson in the movie "Unplanned," talked about the movie in a context of redemption. ("Unplanned" is about Johnson's experience of connecting the dots and realizing her work as a Planned Parenthood clinic director wasn't helping women so much as perpetuating a cycle that hurt women and families and our culture.) The ugliness of our politics is born in this misery that decades of legal abortion have wrought.

The clouds finally scattered, making way for a brilliant light over the crossroads of the world. And it was striking that the protesting people across the street didn't stay for "the moment" – a projection of a baby in the womb in a brilliant 4D ultrasound shown on a big screen in Times Square. And yet most people stopped in their tracks, and I didn't hear any angry back-and-forth chatter, but rather relative silence as a sleepy baby in his mother's (Abby Johnson's) womb gave a little stretch and yawn. And then they heard his heartbeat. In Times Square. It said more than any speech or placard.

It reminded me of the power of the divine life that is in us. Why don't we trust and live from his life more? Saying his name could be the most powerful prayer next to the Mass if it leads us to living this way more fully.

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