

Christ or Barabbas



“What we are doing now, as a society, is deeply unworthy of us.” The late Congressman Henry Hyde pointed this out in a speech in 1987. He was talking about abortion in America. He talked about a time – “and that day, my friends, will come” – after *Roe v. Wade*, when it would be remembered as “a tragic curiosity in our legal textbooks.” He said that the task before and after would be the same. “We must become again a people capable of welcoming new life – weak life, dependent life – into our midst, and cherishing it. We must stop destroying our children waiting to be born. But we shall only stop when we have rediscovered that heritage of hospitality for ourselves.” He said that this work “demands people, leaders, who have assumed responsibility for the long haul, and who can do that because they know what is most urgent in the present moment.”

He pointed out to those in the audience that it is not Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena or Ignatius of Loyola that God chose to be living at this time, but you. I don’t know about you, but I am none of those people. But in the months now since the Supreme Court overturned its deadly *Roe* decision, I keep thinking crazy thoughts: How about I open a maternity home? I suppose I’d have to happen upon a small fortune to do it, but if God wants it ... Or how about a pro-life primary care center for women? Goodness knows, my native New York City needs one.

It shouldn’t be so complicated to let women know that they are not alone when they are scared and pregnant. It’s emotional outside an abortion clinic, but that’s also not the only place we need to be witnesses to love. We tend to complicate things. And politicize them. How about talking about resources? And sharing stories about real life and love?

The other night, I ran into a woman who, with the help of the Sisters of Life, had her baby, finished school and now has a high-end job. A baby didn't ruin her life; it opened her to new love and stretched her generosity. Abortion doesn't only end a life; it ends possibilities. Love is supposed to be challenging. We live in a culture that presents love as convenience and consolation, but it's also sacrificial and difficult and worth every bit of it. That's the war on women – telling them they are not capable of real love in the midst of the messiness and imperfections of life.

Henry Hyde, in that same speech, suggested that the American experiment “cannot go on forever amidst this cruel inhospitality.” Talking to a group of pro-lifers, he said that “we must be the teachers ... of freedom and equality and hospitality. We must help build a community of character, a community that welcomes children and cherishes them.” And then he said, “In other words, we must choose Christ or Barabbas.”

Hyde died in 2007 – 15 years already. His speech was 35 years ago. He no doubt would have cherished seeing the end of *Roe*. But this work he urged seems like it is still an unanswered rallying cry for many of us. What more can each and every one of us do to be more hospitable? What more can each one of us do to be a practical help to a pregnant teenager or otherwise young, scared mother? Are we reaching out to families who are struggling (and so many are) more than we are?

Pope Francis has said that the Beatitudes are our identity cards as Christians. Can anyone tell by the way we approach the abortion debate in the months since *Roe* was overturned? Instead of being drawn to abortion, are more being drawn into our loving hospitality?

“Christ or Barabbas.” That sure does underscore the urgency. And we're not getting more time to rise to the occasion. Now is our time.

It may not be a maternity home or a medical center, but there's something more for each and every one of us. It's not sufficient to vote for politicians who are against abortion. It's not enough to give money to pregnancy care centers. Whatever state you live in, this remains the human-rights issue of our day. So much is entangled and hurt by abortion. We must lead boldly with love for life anew.

Kathryn Jean Lopez is a senior fellow at the National Review Institute and editor-at-large of National Review.