

Council for Life

Novena for Life

'For it was you who created my being, knit me together in my mother's womb. I thank you for the wonder of my being.'
(Psalm 138)

The *Pray for Life Novena* (www.prayforlife.ie) is a new initiative of the Council for Life of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference which took place for the first time this year. It began on Monday, 23 May 2022, and ended on 31 May, the great Feast of the Visitation: 'and Mary rising up in those days went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea' (Lk 1:39).

Adapted from resources originally prepared by the US Bishops' Conference, the Novena was, and is, an invitation to thousands of people across Ireland, and indeed, across the world, to pray for the protection of human life in a special way during the days running up to the Visitation each year. Participants were invited to go to the website prayforlife.ie to subscribe and receive each day's intention.

On this feast day, the church invites us to recall the visitation of our Blessed Mother to her cousin Elizabeth. Launching the *Pray for Life Novena*, Bishop Kevin Doran, chair of the Council for Life, explained that 'the Feast of the Visitation has particular significance when it comes to celebrating and giving thanks for the gift of human life. It is a moment of encounter between two women Mary and Elizabeth, each of whom is unexpectedly pregnant. It is an encounter in which each woman is supported by the other in facing the challenges of pregnancy. It is a graced moment in which each woman acknowledges the child in her womb as a gift from God.'

Mary, an expectant mother could feel the impulse of the baby Jesus growing inside her as she made her way in charity to help her cousin Elizabeth, who was with child. Mary greeted her cousin, and at the sound of her voice, the infant John leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb. Even before His birth, Jesus' unborn presence gave life.

Each day of the Pray for Life novena focuses on a particular intention such as expectant mothers and fathers, unborn



children, for those who defend life, and for an end to abortion, and is accompanied by a short intercession, reflection and suggested action to help build a Culture of Life. The aim of the Novena is to help nurture a culture that respects all human life and to promote the protection of life in its entirety from the moment of conception to its natural end.

Throughout life we all encounter moments of fragility and vulnerability. In these difficult moments we are carried by grace, prayer and by those closest to us. Those who participated in this Novena prayed for Life and all the variables that coincide with it. In our parishes and communities we are privileged to share in the joy of mothers and fathers expecting a new baby, we witness the warmth and well wishes at the wonder of new life, but we also walk with mothers and fathers who may be overwhelmed by the news of pregnancy, or those who have difficulties during these months.

Whatever the circumstance, we, like Mary in the visitation of her cousin, have an opportunity to act in charity towards others. Through participating in the Novena, we are enabled to give the gift of prayer to all the groups mentioned in the intentions.

We can acknowledge that the conscience of our society is experiencing a drought, a cultural quagmire. However,

we have a moment in each and every day to share the gift of the 'living water' with all those we encounter. We have inherited the gift of life and with this gift we have the responsibility to preserve it with respect. As stewards of our lives, God has entrusted us to live and act justly with integrity for the common good.

There is a fundamental well-spring of truth that is muted in our communities: that every life is a good and perfect gift. We are searching, empty vessels at times and perhaps the participation in a novena such as this can help us to reconnect to what is truly authentic. We are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life'. We find ourselves with the 'inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.'
(*Evangelium Vitae*, 28.)

In all life, we see the hand of God. To conclude, in the words of Pope Francis 'Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development'.
(*Gaudete et Exultate*.101)

To take part in the Pray for Life annual novena next year, visit www.prayforlife.ie and sign up.

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