Wait for the fulfillment of our Lord’s plan; it will surely come, it will not disappoint.

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Walk with Christ for Life
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

My friends, as you know, today is Respect Life Sunday. All throughout this month, we as a Church will remember the sacredness of life, and make a concerted effort to defend the lives of the unborn, as well as the poor, the elderly, the ill and all those who are cast aside by our culture.

After so many years of watching abortion end the lives of countless children, we might want to cry out with the same words we heard from the prophet Habakkuk in the first reading: “How long, O Lord?” All around us we still see a culture of death, with the violence and ruin and misery that so disturbed the prophet. But we must not become discouraged, because our Lord is at work. Every day he is reaching out to those who will receive him, every day he is touching hearts and healing their wounds, even the wound of abortion. The prophet tells us to wait for the fulfillment of our Lord’s plan; it will surely come, it will not disappoint.

Some of you might have seen the movie, “Unplanned,” that came out this past year. It tells the story of Abby Johnson, who at one time was the director of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Texas. Abby had the sad experience of actually participating in an abortion, and her eyes were opened to the reality of what was happening: a child was dying. She knew she couldn’t be a part of it anymore, and she walked away. She even became a fervent pro-life activist, and she became a Catholic as well. Why? Because she saw the prayerful witness of those who prayed outside of her abortion clinic, and she knew that the Catholic Church stood for life.

No one could have expected that Abby Johnson would have such a radical change of heart, that she would embrace the gift of life and the gift of faith. But God can still work miracles. Just like Bernard Nathanson, who ran the nation’s largest abortion clinic years before and had a similar conversion of heart, Abby Johnson was touched by the hand of God and saw something she never expected to see. She saw the sacredness of every life, even the most tiny and helpless ones, and she saw the merciful face of God. We thank him for this beautiful conversion, and with faith the size of a mustard seed we believe: God can still do great things.

My brothers and sisters, the most important thing we can do for the cause of life is to pray. And this celebration of the Eucharist is the greatest prayer of all, because we celebrate the saving sacrifice of Jesus himself. It’s tempting at times to go it alone, to imagine that by more effort and activism we can undo the culture of death and bring about the change that we seek. And, of course, our actions make a difference and we should never give up. But we can’t do this alone. Only God himself can bring about the conversion that we hope for. Only God can change the hearts of those who believe that life is expendable. Only God can heal the wounds in our nation and in our culture, especially the wounds that are inflicted by the tragedy of abortion.

And so, we must turn to God in prayer. We pray for the woman or man who would end the life of their child for whatever reason, perhaps out of a sense of desperation. We pray for those who work in the abortion industry, perhaps thinking they’re doing good. We pray for the lawmakers and judges who defend the culture of death. And we pray for those who are indifferent or resigned, who think nothing can be done, or things are fine as they are. We pray, because only God can change hearts, and only God will break down the walls of death. And we
pray that we might not falter or grow faint of heart. We pray that we will always give witness to the love and mercy and compassion of our Lord. We pray for the gift of perseverance, trusting that our Lord is the Lord of life, and he cannot be defeated.

In a short time, we will walk into the streets, bringing our Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament as an act of prayer and reparation and intercession. Jesus did not hold back from going to Calvary, the place of death, and it was there that he conquered death forever. He walks with us today because he can overcome darkness and death here too. He can bring his healing grace to even the most hardened hearts, and he can remind us of the sacredness of life that our culture has forgotten.

In the Gospel, the apostles asked our Lord to increase their faith, and he said to them, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” My friends, we put our faith in Jesus, we follow him and beg him to transform our city, our society, our culture. We pray for a deeper faith, knowing that he can still do great things and change many hearts. We recommit ourselves to him and to the culture of life, ready to give witness to the world around us through our own lives of mercy and compassion. We dedicate ourselves to working for life, reaching out to the unwed mother, the elderly neighbor, the homeless stranger. Where there is darkness and despair, we do what we can to bring a ray of light from our Lord, who can restore hope and peace.

And during this month of October, the month of the Holy Rosary, let us also pray to our Blessed Mother Mary, who bore Jesus, the Lord of Life, in her own womb. Let us ask her to pray for us and with us, so that faith may increase and life may be cherished and protected. She teaches us that God can still do great things.