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Bishop: March for Life participants are pilgrims

Mark Pattison Catholic News Service | Jan. 25, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., likened people coming to Washington to take part in the annual March for Life to pilgrims.

And in that effort, they are linked to "the most blessed of all pilgrims -- the Blessed Virgin Mary," Bishop Lori said in his homily at a Jan. 24 Mass that concluded an overnight National Prayer Vigil for Life at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

"Our journey is not necessarily an easy one," Bishop Lori said. "We got up earlier than we ever thought imaginable to get on a plane to be here" or "had to be cooped up for hours in bus rides" for the march, which is held each year to protest the 1973 Supreme Court decision that permitted abortion virtually on demand.

But Mary's pilgrimage to see her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, "was not easy," he noted. "She didn't have buses or roads or fast-food franchises. She made her way along narrow paths or mountain roads upon which she walked."

Now, Bishop Lori said, "Mary joins us in this pilgrimage dedicated to the cause of life ... from the moment of conception until natural death."

The Mass texts and readings were from the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas.

Bishop Lori said some march participants may feel downhearted because, after so many years, "abortion remains the law of the land" and "new threats (to life) are on the horizon," he said.

But Mary appeared at Tepeyac in the 16th century in the midst of great disrespect for life, and "within a few generations, 9 million people in the New World opened their hearts to Christ," he added.

The bishop said a similar phenomenon is happening in the United States.

"For the first time since Roe v. Wade in 1973, a solid majority of Americans are pro-life," Bishop Lori said, citing a Knights of Columbus-commissioned poll in which eight out of 10 people surveyed favor greater restrictions on abortion; their number, he added, include "two-thirds of those who say they are pro-choice."

"The truth," Bishop Lori said, "is having an effect."

Bishop Lori, who served six years as an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Washington before his appointment to Bridgeport, was one of two bishops at the standing-room-only Mass. The other was Bishop David M. O'Connell of Trenton, N.J., who had been president of The Catholic University of America, next door to the shrine, until his ordination to the episcopate and assignment last year to the New Jersey see.

The cold weather gripping much of the nation also enveloped Washington, where forecasters were predicting Jan. 23 would be the coldest night of the year and the mercury the following day would not rise above freezing.

"God has given us a beautiful day to witness to the dignity of human life," Bishop Lori said near the end of the Mass. "It's a little cold, but the sun is shining."

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