On April 11, 2014, Pope Francis addressed the Italian Pro-Life movement with these provocative words:

“We know that human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil right rests on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, be it quantitative, economic or, least of all, ideological. ‘Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills…. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading” (Evangelii Gaudium #53). And in this way life, too, ends up being thrown away. One of the gravest risks our epoch faces, amid the opportunities offered by a market equipped with every technological innovation, is the divorce between economics and morality, the basic ethical norms of human nature are increasingly neglected. It is therefore necessary to express the strongest possible opposition to every direct attack on life, especially against the innocent and defenseless, and the unborn in a mother’s womb is the example of innocence par excellence. Let us remember the words of the Second Vatican Council: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes” (Gaudium et Spe #51).”

Today we are living in the midst of a culture that denies solidarity and takes the form of a veritable “culture of death”. This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents that encourage an idea of society exclusively concerned with efficiency. It is a war of the powerful against the weak. There is no room in the world for anyone who, like the unborn or the dying, is a weak element in the social structure or anyone who appears completely at the mercy of others and radically dependent on them and can only communicate through the silent language of profound sharing of affection. Abortion is the most serious wound inflicted not only on individuals and their families who should provide the sanctuary for life, but inflicted as well on society and its culture, by the very people who ought to be society’s promoters and defenders. How can we forget Pope Benedict XVI’s words at the opening ceremony of World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney, Australia, on July 17, 2008:

And so we are led to reflect on what place the poor and the elderly, immigrants and the voiceless, have in our societies. How can it be that domestic violence torments so many mothers and children? How can it be that the most wondrous and sacred human space – the womb – has become a place of unutterable violence?
Nor can we forget what Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (#214):

“It is not “progressive” to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life. On the other hand, it is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty. Who can remain unmoved before such painful situations?”

The Catholic Church’s Consistent Ethic of Life

The Roman Catholic Church holds a consistent ethic of life. The Church offers a teaching on the inviolability, the sacredness and dignity of the human person. However, opposition to abortion and euthanasia does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the dignity of the human person such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself, whatever insults human dignity such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, disgraceful working conditions where people are treated as instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons – all of these things and more poison human society.

In economically developed countries, legislation contrary to life is very widespread, and it has already shaped moral attitudes and praxis, contributing to the spread of an anti-birth mentality; frequent attempts are made to export this mentality to other states as if it were a form of cultural progress.

“Openness to life is at the centre of true development,” wrote Pope Benedict in his encyclical Caritas in Veritate. When a society moves toward the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man’s true good. If personal and social sensitivity toward the acceptance of a new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away.” The Holy Father sums up the current global economic crisis in a remarkable way with these words: “Human costs always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs.”

The burning issues of the promotion of human life, from conception to natural death, must be high on the agenda of every human being on every side of the political spectrum. They are not only the concern of the far right of the political spectrum. Many people, blinded by their own zeal and goodness, have ended up defeating the very cause for which we must all defend with every ounce of energy in our flesh and bones.
The market push towards euthanasia

If we look carefully at the great dramas of the last century, we see that as free markets toppled Communism, exaggerated consumerism and materialism infiltrated our societies and cultures. Aging populations, especially in the west, and resulting smaller workforces are now creating a market push towards euthanasia. As St. John Paul II wrote: “a right to die will inevitably give way to the duty to die.”

Most people who think that euthanasia and assisted suicide should be legal are not thinking the whole issue through. They are thinking about personal autonomy and choice. They think about what it would be like to suddenly become incapacitated and consider such a life as undignified or worthless. Perhaps they consider severely disabled people as having no quality of life. Our dignity and quality of life don’t come from what we can or cannot do. Dignity and quality of life are not matters of efficiency, proficiency and productivity. They come from a deeper place – from who we are and how we relate to each other. True compassion leads to sharing another’s pain, not killing the person whose suffering we cannot bear.

In his most recent Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis writes (#48):

“The elderly who are vulnerable and dependent are at times unfairly exploited simply for economic advantage. Many families show us that it is possible to approach the last stages of life by emphasizing the importance of a person’s sense of fulfilment and participation in the Lord’s paschal mystery. A great number of elderly people are cared for in Church institutions, where, materially and spiritually, they can live in a peaceful, family atmosphere. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide; in many countries, they have been legalized. The Church, while firmly opposing these practices, feels the need to assist families who take care of their elderly and infirm members”.

What is wrong with abortion, euthanasia, embryo selection, and embryonic research is not the motives of those who carry them out. So often, those motives are, on the surface, compassionate: to protect a child from being unwanted, to end pain and suffering, to help a child with a life-threatening disease. But in all these cases, the terrible truth is that it is the strong who decide the fate of the weak; human beings therefore become instruments in the hands of other human beings.

Being pro-life is one of the deepest expressions of our baptism: we stand up as sons and daughters of the light, clothed in humility and charity, filled with conviction, speaking the truth to power with firmness, conviction and determination, and never losing joy and hope. Being Pro-Life is not an activity for a political party or a particular side of the spectrum. It is an obligation for everyone: left, right and centre! If we are Pro-Life, we must engage the culture around us, and not curse it. We must see others as Jesus does, and we must love them to life, even those who are opposed to us. To March for Life in Ottawa, Washington and in many other cities of the world means that we stand up for all human life, and we do not have a myopic view of the cause of life. Let us strive for a consistent ethic of human life, from womb to tomb. Being pro-life in this day and age is truly prophetic, and it will bring about authentic development and enduring peace in our world.