

Archbishop Francis Kalist - 5th National March For Life

Your Eminence Poola Cardinal Anthony, our CBCI President and Archbishop of Hyderabad, Your Grace George Antonysamy, our TNBC President & Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, all my Brother Bishops and all my beloved People of God.

Last few years, at the National March for Life, I spoke to you about the reality of the culture of death through contraception in our country. We reflected on Casti Connubii, the encyclical of Pope Pius XI "On Chaste Wedlock" written in 1930, and Humanae Vitae, the encyclical of Pope St. Paul VI written in 1968. This year, I wish to address a more specific evil: the tragedy of abortion that is destroying our families from the encyclical Evangelium Vitae (Gospel of Life) of Pope St. John Paul II written in 1995.

Many people, especially those in positions of authority—politicians, bishops, priests, religious, lawmakers, members of the judiciary, and medical professionals—remain ignorant of the slaughter of over 1 crore and 56 lakh babies every year in India. Over 46,000 children are killed in the womb every day in India. That means that every two seconds, a child becomes a victim of abortion. Even as I speak now, another innocent life is being lost to abortion in India.

One of the primary responsibilities of bishops and priests is to teach and preach. Sadly, many of us shy away from fulfilling this duty. Many of us are unaware of our responsibility to “speak out for those who cannot speak,” as told in Proverbs 31:8.

On May 18, 2025, Pope Leo XIV, in his homily, said, “It is the responsibility of the bishops, as successors of the apostles and shepherds of Christ’s flock, to be the first to cast their nets into the sea and become ‘fishers of families.’” He further emphasized that the laity are also called to participate in this mission, to become, alongside ordained ministers, “fishers” of couples, young people, children, women, and men of all ages and circumstances, so that all may encounter the one Saviour.

I echo what Pope Leo XIV said to the bishops: become “fishers of families.” And to the laity, I urge you to become fishers of individual members of the family, working together with the bishops, priests and religious. The question we must ask ourselves today is: how many of our shepherds and leaders are truly “fishers of families”? How often have you heard a bishop, priest, or retreat preacher speak about the sin of abortion, contraception, or gender ideology in their catechesis? Sadly, we have hardly heard. This silence often stems from a lack of conviction or confusion on these critical matters. Instead, in the name of “misguided mercy,” many shepherds have forgotten to speak the truth to families.

I repeat: “misguided mercy” has entered the Church. As Cardinal Robert Sarah once famously said, “Do not deceive people with the word ‘mercy.’ God forgives sin only if we

repent of it.” This mercy came at a great cost—the Lord and Savior of the whole world had to die on the cross, to save us from our sins. Please don’t take it for granted.

The next question to consider is how often these issues are addressed in our schools, colleges, catechism classes, etc. Once again, the answer is hardly ever. Many of our teachers are also not convinced about these truths or are confused about them. Pope Benedict XVI once stated, "We wish to make it clear that departure from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral."

That’s why Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen cried out, “Who is going to save our Church? Not our bishops, not our priests and religious. It is up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes, and the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to ensure that your priests act like priests, your bishops act like bishops, and your religious act like religious.”

This India’s March For Life is primarily an initiative of the laity. The laity who keep meeting and know the families came and told me, “Your Grace, this is what is happening in our families with regard to faith & morals. After much deliberations, I got convinced and presented it two times at the CBCI & CCBI Standing Committee meetings and the Bishop’s readily accepted our proposal to conduct the National March For Life every year in a given diocese. In fact, at the last CCBI Executive Meeting, the Latin Bishop’s in India have appointed Mr. Ajin Joseph as an Associate Secretary of the Family Commission with special charge for

Pro Life Ministry. The bishop's have given him the mandate to visit every Catholic college, hospitals and dioceses to establish pro life cells. I firmly believe, this recent appointment is a fruit of the various Pro Life & March For Life initiatives the church in India has taken up in the last five years. I congratulate all of you for this. Mr. Ajin is also the author and composer of the anthem of our annual gathering, March For Life. Please use it to form the consciences of our people.

In the Gospel of Matthew 16:1-4, we see Jesus confronting the Sadducees and Pharisees for their failure to interpret the "signs of the times." In Matthew 16:4, we read that Jesus left them because they could not discern the truth. Jesus withdraws from us when we fail to proclaim the truth to His people. As Pope St. John Paul II once said, "We must defend the truth at all costs. Even if we are reduced to twelve again."

On my mission travels, countless mothers have shared with me, "Your Grace, had the Church leaders openly told us about what happens in an abortion when we were newly married or when we conceived, we wouldn't have committed abortion." At the same time, I have also witnessed families striving to imitate the Holy Family once they discovered the truth through various pro-life initiatives. Many of those gathered here today are products of hearing the truth through CHARIS India's pro-life awareness conferences like Flesh & Bones and Vita.

I have also noticed, there is a wrong teaching circulating in the Church today: that the pro-life apostolate is just social work. It is not mere social work. It is a profound call to

uphold the dignity and rights of the most vulnerable members of society—the unborn children who are killed through abortion, and the elderly who are victims of mercy killing or euthanasia.

While many religious congregations are engaged in works for the poor, the widow, the migrants and the orphan, as well as in rehabilitation for substance abuse and other social causes. There are very few organisations specifically addressing abortion, such as crisis pregnancy centres like Life For All, Eva Pro Life and Saved Pearl Foundation. You can meet them at the Pro Life Exhibition to know more about them. This Pro-Life ministry, my brothers and sisters, is specifically about defending the rights of the unborn and the elderly. Please understand this.

As Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, “The refusal to take sides on great moral issues is itself a decision. It is a silent acquiescence to evil. The tragedy of our time is that those who still believe in honesty lack fire and conviction, while those who believe in dishonesty are full of passionate conviction.”

The time has come to take sides and boldly proclaim a Culture of Life among our shepherds, priests, religious, and all the People of God. Before you leave this place, I urge each of you to visit the Pro Life Exhibition beautifully prepared by various Pro Life organisations of the country, to learn more about the Culture of Life. The sanctity of families and marriages must be restored through the authentic teachings of the Church, and through clear demonstrations against the Culture of Death. I firmly believe that the sanctity of priesthood and religious life will also be restored

if we have Holy Families and Holy Marriages.

Therefore, I appeal to all my brother bishops, priests, religious sisters and brothers, and those in leadership positions over Catholic institutions such as colleges, seminaries, formation houses, priests' retreats, and schools, to proclaim the Gospel of Life with much urgency and courage. I highly recommend conducting CHARIS India's Flesh & Bones and Vita pro-life formation programs, so that the authentic and authoritative teachings of Divinum Arcanum, Humanae Vitae, Casti Connubii, Evangelium Vitae, and teachings on Gender ideology are made known, ensuring that the sanctity of life is upheld from womb to tomb.

I offer my gratitude to His Grace Archbishop George Anthonymsamy, for hosting this year's National March for Life so beautifully, and to His Eminence Poola Cardinal Anthony, our CBCI President for agreeing to host the next National March for Life on August 8 & 9, 2026 in Hyderabad. I also thank all the priests, religious and the faithful for their strong conviction and unwavering support for the pro-life ministry in India. The Pro Life work you have begun in the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore should not stop today. It is just a new beginning and it should continue until Abortion becomes unthinkable in India. Pro Life cells established in each parish should continue their work in forming the consciences of all people on the Gospel of Life. Additionally, I want to thank all the pro life organisations that have contributed much, various family commission delegates from many dioceses under the aegis of CBCI & CCBI who have come here in large numbers. Thank you.

As I conclude, I am reminded of St. John Leonardi's words: "Those who want to work for moral reform in the world must seek the glory of God before all else." Seeking the glory of God, let us continue to march for life until the law of God, which preserves and protects life in all its stages, is restored in our beloved nation India.
God bless you all!