

your answer ready but do it with courtesy and respect. Respect for life is deeply embedded in Irish society. Respect for the unborn is widely acknowledged also, and, hopefully, we will continue with this commendable tradition.

Take time to pray at this particular time, it is the greatest power on earth. May the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, protect all mothers, all unborn babies, all medical and nursing staff and all who make the laws of our land.

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PASTORAL LETTER ON THE RIGHT TO LIFE

The title “Mother” is possibly the most honoured title in the world. Mothers are the most loved and respected in every culture, in every continent, in every country down through the ages. Children become very much aware of this when they sit by their mother’s deathbed and ask the nurse: “Can you find a heartbeat?” and the nurse simply replies: “I am afraid not, I am sorry” ... life and heartbeat are inseparable.

The question, “can you find a heartbeat?” is also asked in a very different setting, when a pregnant woman visits a prenatal clinic. Coming as early as six weeks in her pregnancy, through the vivid evidence of ultrasound images, the nurse’s words: “I can hear the heartbeat loud and clear” change the woman’s life forever. The beautiful vocation of motherhood begins with the beating of the child’s heart and lasts for life. She is now the mother of a child, a child that has a separate existence from her own even though it is dependent on her for nourishment, protection and life itself.

We must always care for the mother and the child. Responsible support must also come from the father. We must, especially, support women with a crisis pregnancy.

‘It is sad that there are children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of day’. St. John Paul.

'Ireland should be proud of the 8th Amendment' John Bruton, former Taoiseach.

Pope Francis said recently that **“we must do more to accompany women in difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their painful anguish”**. Many women who have had abortions would be more willing to carry their children to term if they had received support from important people in their lives and from society.

A mother may also be informed that her baby faces serious challenges or is perhaps terminally ill. She might be pregnant as a result of rape. Especially in those tragic cases both the mother and her unborn child can and must be loved and cherished. The child in the womb is innocent of the circumstances of its conception and its health condition. There is no other situation in life where the ending of the life of an innocent person is the answer to a difficulty. To talk to families of babies with life-limiting conditions and to see such great love is very rewarding. The witness of those who participate in the Paralympic Games shows us how people compete and excel in sport, using their gifts to the full.

Human life is sacred and precious. Every human being must be treated with the greatest respect. This is true in every moment of life from its first beginning to its natural end. This respect for life is shared by people of all faiths and none. While it is enriched by our Catholic faith, it is our common humanity that convinces us of the right to life of every human being.

In 1983, the Irish people voted into the Constitution an amendment that would give the unborn child the same legal right as the mother. Under its provisions, no life-saving treatment **is** ever, or legally **can** ever, be denied to an expectant mother. The Catholic Church has never taught that the life of the child in the womb should be preferred to that of the mother. A doctor may give any treatment that is necessary to either mother or child without deliberately intending harm to the other. Abortion is the deliberate medical intervention to end the life of an unborn child. There is a danger that people may confuse abortion with necessary medical intervention.

Once again, after 30 years, we are facing a referendum on abortion. Irish people are again being asked to speak up for the infants in the womb who have no voice to beg for protection for their lives which are just beginning. This will be a very important moment in Irish history. Ireland will be the first country in the world to hold a referendum to introduce abortion by popular vote. Will the people of Ireland decide that there is no safe place for the unborn?

In all the political debates there is no mention of alternatives to abortion nor the impact of abortion in England. Neither is there any mention of the ‘rightness’ and ‘wrongness’ of human behaviour. All authorities on moral matters agree that the deliberate taking of an innocent human life is always gravely wrong. We can be sure that if a society decides that human life is disposable at its beginning, it will not be too long before it decides the same for human life at its end.

Finally, the Supreme Court has stated that the unborn baby enjoys only one constitutional right, the right to life. We will be asked in the Referendum to remove the only remaining effective law to protect the unborn. We can choose to retain the 8th Amendment, under which doctors and hospitals will protect the lives of both baby and mother to a standard of care that is considered the highest in the world or we can repeal the 8th Amendment and leave babies with no protection whatsoever. The legislators will then be able to propose laws for abortion right up to birth, with no restrictions and over which the people of Ireland will have no control. We can only speculate as to how many lives have been saved by the 8th Amendment.

We will never again have a more important vote. There is no cause more noble than to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Never before in history have we had so much scientific proof that the unborn baby is, in fact, a living, breathing human being. The 8th Amendment is often not understood. It is up to all of us to explain its implications to people in our families, our work life and our friends. Have

Irish proverb: 'Never take down a fence until you find out why it was put up in the first place'.