

September 23, 2009

Dear Fathers,

On this Feast of Pio of Pietrelcina, we begin the 40 Days for Life North Dakota campaign, a concerted effort of prayer, fasting and peaceful vigil with the goals of educating the public about the evil of abortion, saving lives and seeking the conversion of souls. For the third consecutive year, the Catholic faithful will join many others in prayerful witness to the dignity of all human life as we pray, 24 hours per day for 40 days, on the sidewalk outside North Dakota's only abortion facility, the Red River Women's Clinic at 512 1st Ave. N. in Fargo. Together we will implore our Lord to pour His mercy out upon our state to bring an end to the callous act of abortion through which more than 25 unborn babies are killed in their mothers' wombs each week in Fargo by abortion-inducing drugs and surgical procedures.

As shepherds of the faithful, we are called to imitate the sacrifices of Padre Pio who died on this date 41 years ago. The Vatican Web site notes, "Like the Apostle Paul, Padre Pio da Pietrelcina placed at the centre of his life and apostolic work the Cross of his Lord as his strength, his wisdom and his glory. Inflamed by love of Jesus Christ, he became like him in the sacrifice of himself for the salvation of the world."

Most especially in the "Year for Priests" we too are called to sacrifice – to carry the cross of Christ. With Christ we stand in prayerful witness, in the cold, the rain, the snow, enduring the glances of hatred and the words of disgust from those who do not understand. In faithful hope we pray that some will come to understand, that hearts will be transformed, unborn babies will be saved from death and parents will escape the agony of later realizing that their choice ended the life of their child.

I will pray on the sidewalk in front of the abortion facility on Friday, September 25, at 11 a.m. and again on Respect Life Sunday when I lead a Eucharistic procession to the abortion facility, carrying our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to the site of death for so many of His children. I ask that each of you schedule at least one hour of prayer outside the abortion facility during these 40 days. I realize this will require great sacrifice for some of you in terms of miles traveled and time away from other pastoral duties. Yet I am confident that much fruit will come from your time spent in conversation with God at the site of this modern day, legally protected holocaust. Please also encourage your parishioners to take up the cross of Christ for the most vulnerable among us.

"For Padre Pio, faith was life: he willed everything and did everything in the light of faith. He was assiduously devoted to prayer. He passed the day and a large part of the night in conversation with God. He would say: 'In books we seek God, in prayer we find him. Prayer is the key which opens God's heart'" (www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20020616_padre-pio_en.html).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo