

Preview

TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The 40-Day Companion
to Live a Culture of Life

Shawn D. Carney

Cappella
Books
Nashville, Tennessee

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Foreword

*“Love is . . . the fundamental
and innate vocation (call) of every human being.”*

– Pope John Paul II

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In March of 2004, I joined my Sisters to kneel at the front of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, professing our vows to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life as a fully-recognized Catholic religious community of women.* In July of that same year, sixteen hundred miles away in College Station, Texas, a group of fervent pro-lifers bowed their heads around an old wooden table for an hour of prayer. For each of us, in those singular moments, a grace that had been percolating for some time was confirmed by the Holy Spirit—a new grace for the cause of life.

We both found and were confirmed in the reality that being pro-life today can no longer be just an activist activity. It’s been tried—and the result, generally speaking? Burnout, bitterness, and disappointment. In a world battered and bruised by the forces of darkness—darkness greater than our human strength—a spiritual response is needed.

To the Heart of the Matter may be the first-ever public work that articulates what this spiritual response is, what it is to be pro-life in daily living. It’s a response that is fresh and integrated and strikingly bold in its simplicity. It’s a way that is new and yet as old as the Christian life.

What is this way, exactly? It’s a way of love. It’s learning the primacy of being over doing. It’s rediscovering the power of love in the little

things: caring for our families, daily sacrifices, prayer and intercession, celebration, mercy, forgiveness, and speaking the truth in love. It’s letting the joy of Life—Life who is a person, Jesus Christ—permeate our lives. It’s leaning our full weight on the One who conquered the grave, throwing self-reliance to the wind. It’s living as if everything matters . . . because it does. For, indeed, because of the Incarnation, nothing again would be casual or small. Jesus has filled everything with light, He is the final word, and history belongs to Him.

In Mark 9, Jesus tells His disciples, “This demon can only be cast out by prayer and fasting.” What Shawn Carney helped to begin in 2004 as a movement of prayer, fasting, community outreach, and vigil in response to a spirit of contempt for human life has blossomed into a far-reaching communion of souls. As one who has lived the pro-life cause from the inside out, Shawn knows where its power lies: in the little things. Whatever we do with love and prayer—no matter our state in life—can build and is building a culture of life. We matter. Our prayer matters. And what we do with our love matters.

You’ll find that this book shines a light on that which is most essential in the fight for life: that being pro-life today means first witnessing to what it is to be fully, joyfully, unabashedly human . . . for, as Saint Irenaeus said, “the glory of God is man fully alive.”

* The Sisters of Life were founded on June 1, 1991; after years of living and “testing” the grace of our foundation, on March 25, 2004, we were confirmed by the Church in the authenticity of the charism of life that we had received.

This book is a call to hope. It's a call to living with intention. It's a call to love.

God raises up people in every age to meet the needs of the day. The time for activism alone has passed; now is the time for saints. Now is the time for men and women who have

been transformed by Love. So let us not be afraid. Let us lift up our chins. Let us live like we've never lived before.

*Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV
Superior General, Sisters of Life*

Preview

First Things First

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In a memorable scene, Forrest Gump simply and confidently tells his embittered and despairing former lieutenant, “I’m going to Heaven, Lieutenant Dan.” Unimpressed, Lieutenant Dan replies with a smirk, “Oh? Well, before you go, why don’t you get your butt down to the corner and get us another bottle of Ripple?”* Obediently, Forrest departs saying, “Yes sir.”

As we strive to live for Heaven with simplicity and focus, we are often reminded that the world prefers a bottle of Ripple. This is an old struggle; however, the degree to which the world has grown hostile to what we ought to hold most dear is unprecedented. This hostile environment makes *your* daily activities, routine, and priorities more important than ever before.

What is it that has created such an opportunity for your daily heroism?

The assault on the family.

The current assault is unlike any in history. We see it in the opposition to the natural and divine understanding of marriage, gender, children, sex, and sacrifice. This assault is philosophical, institutional, and even bloody. Out of 195 countries, abortion is legal in all but 5. With the support and funding of most of those governments, 56 million people are killed *every* year. It is unprecedented by the sheer numbers alone.

But it is unprecedented in another way as well. Unlike prior wars, genocides, or mass

executions that have darkened human history, this holocaust is directed at the most unexpected and helpless of victims: our own children.

It is not hyperbolic to say that abortion is not only the defining moral issue of our time, but it is the defining moral issue of *all* of time. Of course, there are many injustices and brutal assaults on the dignity of the human person; I am not claiming my genocide can beat up your genocide. But I am saying that the violence of the act, the helplessness of the victim, the corruption of the fundamental relationship of parent and child, the global support of the powerful, and the scale of lives claimed—56 million every year—put us in dramatically uncharted waters.

Despite this grim reality, I am not a nut who runs around my dry cleaner or grocery store yelling at innocent bystanders about the injustice of abortion. Nor am I a “the world is going to Hell in a handbasket” kind of Christian. I am genuinely joyful, hopeful, and inspired by all that is going on in the pro-life movement. But I am not naive, and neither are most people I encounter in this great work.

We didn’t get here overnight, and it won’t be fixed overnight. We might ask ourselves, who are we to fix it anyway? We have jobs, kids, grandkids, lawns that need cutting, milk that needs purchasing, and our endless and ever-growing to-do lists. We are busy. And, frankly, 56 million abortions every year is overwhelming.

* wine

After all, I barely make enough time for daily prayer, oil changes, or reading this book. What can I possibly do?

The answer lies with only six words that give us daily spiritual guidance in the noisy and difficult times in which we live. They were spoken by someone who did not get overwhelmed by the circumstances she faced but kept first things first and entrusted all to Jesus Christ.

Do small things with great love.
– Mother Teresa

Ironically, Mother Teresa was sometimes accused of not doing enough for the poorest of the poor.

No one grows up wanting an abortion, and no one grows up wanting to work in the abortion industry. I've been outside more than 450 abortion facilities as a result of 40 Days for Life—forty days of prayer, fasting, and peaceful vigil outside of abortion facilities—spreading to over 850 cities in sixty-one countries. We have seen 1 million volunteers around the world help close more than 100 abortion facilities, save nearly seventeen thousand lives, and help two hundred abortion workers have a change of heart and leave their jobs.

I have seen women and men go in for an abortion from every walk of life, and the common theme is simple: *pain*. Pain fuels the abortion industry, and most often that pain started at home. We simply cannot have abuse, divorce, loss of faith, promiscuity, and the destruction of marriage without casualties.

Abortion is the symptom of the destruction of the family, and family is restored with love.

Many people complain to me that they are unable to do enough to help end abortion.

They want to do more and sometimes feel guilty for not doing more. The truth is that if we don't put first things first in our daily lives, it will not matter what we do. If our lives, jobs, duties, and routines are not done with great love, we are not really pro-life because we are not really living an interior life. We are only activists trying to make it through the day alone, not realizing God is with us, for us, and in us.

I encounter saints and heroes every week who are ending abortion not by speaking or writing about the culture of life but by *living* the culture of life every day by doing small things with great love. Most of them don't realize it, but by being faithful to their commitment to Christ daily in prayer, work, and family—by doing small things with great love—they attack the culture of death. They go to the heart of the matter.

I am often asked, "What can I do with the little time that I have to help end abortion?" This book is a simple daily guide of small actions and prayer intentions to help focus our efforts. It is broken up into forty days, a chapter for each day. They are designed to be used any time of year or can serve as a daily companion for Lent or a 40 Days for Life campaign. They are simple and to the point—or, I should say, to the heart of the matter. They are small ways, accessible to each of us, to help end abortion, restore the family, and change the world for the greater glory of God.

These are difficult times but not hopeless times. We are here in this time in history for a reason.

Let's get started . . .

Spilled Milk

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I have eight kids.

From the time we dated, Marilisa and I wanted a lot of kids, and we have been greatly blessed. We also have no recollection of someone not needing something.

Throughout my travels people always comment (with varying levels of appropriateness) on the number of kids I have. From the predictable, “Do you know what causes that?” to the old, “Did you intend to have that many?” I have heard it all.

Our life is not chaotic or out of control. Our kids were not all delivered on our doorstep by Saint Peter in the middle of the night. With that said, we have had several phases in which we juggled three kids, three years old and under. Occasionally we’ve joked about driving ourselves to the local psychiatric clinic and being committed (particularly after long hours in the van).

Though our homelife is busy, constant, and often loud, it is happy and peaceful. However, there is one thing that drives me nuts that I will complain about to you: spilled milk.

I hate the sight of spilled milk, I hate cleaning spilled milk, and I hate the avoidability of spilled milk. While it tends to be the worst during the stage when a kid moves from a sippy cup to a “big kid” cup, it is not contained to that stage. I have threatened to make a nine-year-old use a sippy cup.

We all speak out against the big injustices of racism, violence, or abortion. But what are the small, normal battles in each of our days? What is your spilled milk? Doing what is tedious or inconvenient out of love for our families and for God is how we change the culture from the ground up. It is also what affirms our littleness in God’s plan. This is the irony of motherhood being so belittled today. Mothers do the daily work that will have the greatest impact on the future of the world, and yet our culture often wonders why they don’t get a real job.

The state of the family is a mess, and God has given us many ways during the day to clean up the mess, literally. Let us not belittle, underestimate, or avoid these small things.

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Daily Scripture:

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

– *Isaiah 55:9*

Daily Intention:

Let me use my small pains today as a reminder to pray for all children scheduled to be aborted this day.

God's Will

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Attributing things to “God’s will” can elicit varied reactions, from obedience to skepticism.

A friend of mine was the son of a Baptist preacher, and whenever his dad found a parking space he said, “Praise God! It’s God’s will we park here!” It drove my friend crazy. “Does God really care where we park?” he stewed.

Even if I exclude my own discernment of God’s will for my life, I am well acquainted with His will for my life according to other people. I frequently hear that God has told someone to tell me to do something they themselves are unwilling to do. Isn’t that nice of Him to do that?

God’s will is not a trite phrase or a mere concept or joke. God willed us into existence, He willed us to our faith in Him, and He wills us to be breathing right now. He also willed that we live in this time in history, a time that is witnessing the largest slaughter of innocent children *ever*.

It is His will that abortion end and His will that we help bring about that end. To what capacity we help in this effort is for us to discern. We must simply do what Father John Hardon said is one of the hardest tasks, “To will the will of God.”

That He wills our very existence imbues our lives with meaning and purpose. John Henry Newman rightly saw that being His creation is both an affirmation of our intrinsic worth and a mandate to serve: “Whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve [God], in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”

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Daily Scripture:

And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

– *Romans 8:27*

Daily Intention:

I will pray to will the will of God for what my role is in ending abortion in my community and country.