



PHOTO BY MATTHEW PROSPERIE

The Houma-Thibodaux pilgrims participating in the annual March for Life are pictured at the Pastoral Center in Schriever before departing for the pilgrimage.

**Guest
Columnist**

Rev. Mr. Patrick
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Marching for a true Culture of Life

Bright and early on Monday, Jan. 14, two busloads of pilgrims left the Pastoral Center in Schriever headed to Washington, D.C. This trip was different than most trips to our nation's capital, though. We were on a mission to give a voice to those who have no voice, to stand up for the life and dignity of every human person. The March for Life is the nation's largest movement fighting for the right to life for all people and has occurred

every year since the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in America. However, the pilgrimage aimed to show the pilgrims that this movement is so much bigger than one court decision – it comes down to the very heart of our encounter with Jesus Christ.

The motto that we chanted on the bus multiple times a day sums up nicely the spirit of the pilgrimage, and the means by which we can change hearts in our society. "What do we want? A culture of life! How do we get it? prayer and sacrifice!" We desire not just an end to abortion but to establish a true culture of life in our world. And the only way that can happen is by our prayer and by our sacrifices.

The church has a long tradition of the practice of pilgrimage – men and women travelling long distances to holy sites symbolizing our earthly journey to a heavenly destiny. We stopped at many of the most revered sites in America, such as Arlington National Cemetery, the Vietnam War Memorial and the Korean War Memorial, where we prayed for the soldiers who gave their lives to protect the right to life in this country. We stopped to pray and offer Mass at various churches,

including the motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville, TN, and the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. We were able to pray with thousands of other pilgrims from around the country in eucharistic adoration at the Life Is Very Good rally in Arlington, VA.

In addition to our prayers, everyone on the trip made sacrifices – both big and small – to show their willingness to fight for the truth and to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Everything from having to sleep on a moving bus for two nights, many late nights and early mornings, enduring cold weather, and bumping through large grounds – all of it showed that we were there for a purpose. All of these sacrifices have real power to convert hearts – both those we pray for and encounter as well as our own.

If we hope to truly change our culture into a Culture of Life, we have to recognize our own dignity that flows from an encounter with Jesus. "Unique: From Day One" was the theme of the March for Life this year, and that applies both to the unborn and to every single person we encounter. Changing laws isn't enough. We have to ➡

change hearts, and the only thing that can truly transform a person is an encounter with the love of Jesus. It starts in our homes and our schools – if we aren't fully “pro-life” there, if we don't recognize and honor the dignity of everyone, including ourselves, then we won't be able to bring about a lasting conversion of heart.

These pilgrims truly gave themselves to this process of encountering Jesus more deeply in their own lives so that they can spread that encounter back in their homes, parishes and schools. We were blessed to have the presence of priests and seminarians, religious brothers and sisters, and married couples to witness to the deeper vocation that God is calling each of the youth to so that they can see how he wants them to spread a culture of life. A truly pro-life generation starts here with the little decisions we make each day and our willingness to give our hearts to Jesus in prayer and in sacrifice. If we truly want to usher in a culture of life, let's do what it takes to do just that: pray and sacrifice.

(Patrick Riviere is a transitional deacon who will be ordained to the priesthood in May of this year). **BC**



Rev. Mr. Patrick Riviere

Local students participate in the Louisiana Life March South 2019 in Baton Rouge



Youth from Vandebilt Catholic High School in Houma and church parishes in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux attend the Louisiana Life March South 2019 in Baton Rouge.

