

Keynote Address to the Kansas Congressional Pro-Life Prayer Breakfast
January 29, 2011 – The 150th Anniversary of Kansas Statehood

Fr. Shawn P. Tunink

Kansas Must Lead

It's an honor to be back here with you this morning, especially on this historic day, the 150th anniversary of our state, Kansas Day. I celebrate this day every year and it's a great privilege to be here on our 150th anniversary. I have to admit though that when David Gitrich called me up and asked me to give this keynote address I was a little apprehensive. You see I was here two years ago to give this address and, as I told David, to be perfectly honest, I used all my good stuff. David told me not to worry. He reminded me that the breakfast is early, people are half asleep and no one remembers what you said last time. I don't know if that's good or bad, but hopefully you'll remember a little of today's address.

I was in fact tempted to use the same speech as last time, but you know, the situation is different now. I remember two years ago that things were looking a little grim. Our nation had just elected the most pro-abortion President in history. There was no hope of getting any pro-life legislation passed on the national level. And here in Kansas we had a governor that was set to veto any pro-life bills brought forward by the good people of this state through their representatives.

What a difference two years can make! Things on the national level are looking much brighter, and here in Kansas we've got Kansans seeing sunflowers once again as an old friend has become our new governor and we are so proud of him. We him fighting the good fight in Washington, but we are so happy he's home with us .

You know I was thinking of things for the governor to do now that he's back home. I'm sure he's got a lot of things. He probably needs to practice signing his signature. I'm sure it takes a lot more effort than vetoing things to actually sign the bills and he's going to have a lot of pro-life legislation sitting on his desk, so he probably needs to practice his signature. I thought maybe if he needs the governor's mansion blessed or exorcised or anything I could help.

You know, I have to admit that my family and I enjoyed very much watching the series that the Learning Channel put together entitled, "Sarah Palin's Alaska." It shows Governor Palin taking her family all over the beautiful state of Alaska and showing off all its natural wonders. I was thinking, wouldn't it be great to have a series on "Sam Brownback's Kansas." We could show Governor Brownback scaling the snow-covered snowy heights of Mt. Sunflower or taming a wild buffalo. Kansas has just as much to be proud of as Alaska. We do have the world's largest ball of twine after all.

Yes, we have lots to be proud of in our great state. 150 years of history. 150 years ago today we became the 34th state in the United States. To be honest, this has always been one of my favorite days. I found in my mailbox just yesterday the traditional card from my mom with all of our great Kansas symbols on the front. There's the famous buffalo and the sunflower, with the state insect, the honey bee, on the sunflower...that was a very nice touch...a little box turtle which is our state reptile. I'm not sure I've ever

seen a western meadowlark, but it is our state bird. I think there's a plastic one out in front of the statehouse in a park.

I know all these things because I went all through public schools in Kansas. I'm a native of Kansas. I was born in Lansing. I went all through Lansing public schools and graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in Computer Science. So I've been in Kansas my whole life and I'm very proud of our state, and not just all the symbols...which I had to learn because a bunch of you legislators passed a law that all Kansas students had to learn Kansas history. So I learned all that stuff and I remember it, but the thing that has always stuck in my mind about Kansas history, the thing that makes me most proud of our state is when I hear the tales of "bleeding Kansas." It was a sad time in our nation's history, but here in Kansas we came down on the right side of history, and ever since, the title "free state" has been the great badge of honor forever linked with Kansas.

Today, we come here to pray for the cause of life, to once again assure that Kansas comes down on the right side of history. Make no mistake; the pro-life movement is the civil-rights movement of our day.

In the 1860's it was Kansas who led the cause for freedom and made us all proud. It was a Kansan who led our troops into battle in World War II and afterward led our nation in peace. It was Kansas that led the nation in ending segregation in our schools. As we question what will end the modern tragedy of abortion on demand in our country, what we need is a leader. I say that once again, as has been our place in history, Kansans must come together, Kansas must lead.

In the 1860's many people were saying that the only way to maintain peace was to compromise and declare that some people were really only 3/5ths of a person. Kansas said no. Kansas must lead. Any so-called peace that would mean degrading a human person to the level of mere property would be no peace at all. Rather such a compromise would mean the disintegration of our union and the death of our moral character. Though fearful of war, those Kansans heard the call. Kansas must lead, and so the free-staters of Kansas took up arms with many others and went to war to ensure true peace and justice for all.

Today, we see that the unborn child is not even accorded the dignity of being 3/5ths of a person. Rather we are told that they are not people at all and can therefore be thrown away as mere trash. What will be our response? Who will stand up to protect the dignity of all human life, from conception to natural death? Who is willing to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves? Kansas must lead.

When General Eisenhower's troops reached the death camps of Nazi Germany, the general ordered that pictures be taken and that as many people as possible be made to see the horrific site. He knew that no one would believe what had happened if they didn't see it for themselves. He knew that if people didn't see for themselves the atrocity of what took place they could deny it and, worse, it could happen again. At this low point in our human history a Kansan was there to lead and do the best he could for the future.

Today, the horror of abortion continues largely because it remains unseen. Even those in favor of abortion can only manage to speak of "choice." Choice to do what? That is the question. Much like the

pictures of the death camps of World War II, when we look at what the choice of abortion really means we are horrified. Yet look we must if we are ever to end this new holocaust. It is for this reason that everyone should be in favor of laws which ensure that a mother seeking an abortion has a chance to see her baby. Studies show that if a mother sees the image of her baby on a sonogram that over 75% of the time she changes her mind about abortion. It is for this reason that organizations such as the Knights of Columbus are paying to ensure that there are sonogram machines in all crisis pregnancy centers. It is not surprising that this is also why organizations such as Planned Parenthood are seeking to hide sonogram images from mothers seeking abortion.

General Eisenhower, through his courageous actions and those of so many other allied soldiers, ended a genocide in Europe and helped prevent future tragedies. Who will fight to end the ongoing genocide of abortion that has already claimed over 53 million young victims? Who will force the world to look at these horrors and confront the reality of abortion? Even in this sad duty, Kansas must lead.

Despite the victories won for freedom in the civil war and the lessons learned in World War II, the 1950's still found an entire segment of our nation's people considered separate but equal. Through the efforts of fearless Kansans confident of a brighter future, the Supreme Court eventually ended this practice that created such shameful and unnecessary division. Touring the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education Historical Site today, one laments the days that saw those who God intended to be brothers and sisters instead turned against each other and "separate." Though a shameful part of our past, we can look with pride today and know that they were Kansas who finally had the courage to stand up and say "enough...this must stop."

Kansas led our nation then. Who will lead us now in saying "enough" when a mother is so unnaturally turned against the child of her womb? Who will help her through a time of crisis? Who will say "enough" to those who treat a little baby as a disease or mere "blob of tissue?" Who can help bring reconciliation, peace, and unity where there is shameful division? Who will demand that all people have equal dignity, both a mother and her baby? Once again, Kansas must lead.

Yes, Kansas must lead...today even as it has in the past. Yet leadership is not easy. The easy way is to just go with the flow. The easy way is to just accept Roe vs. Wade as "settled law." The easy way is to play the political game, get as much money as possible for our state and our districts and then get reelected. The easy way is to hide and never really let people know what you stand for. The easy way is to remain quiet in the face of injustice. The easy way is to pretend that there is nothing we can do to make a difference.

Kansas is not this kind of a state. Kansans are not this kind of people and we've never settled for the easy way. Kansans are leaders. We are not the quiet victims of history. In Kansas, we make history.

As we look at the great history of our state, I have often wondered what was the key that allowed afforded Kansans the courage and strength of character to lead through so many troubled times. I really find two things. First, the key principle behind each of the issues that made Kansas famous is a belief that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God. If everyone is equal, there must be some source for this equality. If we are to be truly equal, we must recognize that this equality comes from the

God who created us in his own image and likeness. Our Declaration of Independence recognizes that each of us has certain rights that are not conceded to us by the government, but rather with which we are endowed by our creator. It is not insignificant that the first of these enumerated rights is that of the right to life.

Our founding fathers had the good sense to realize that we do not create life. Life is a gift and not something that we are meant to toy with as though we are in control. Rather we are stewards of the gift of life given us by our creator. Our response to this gift can only be one of thanksgiving and humility, never one of control or manipulation.

I believe that it was this shared belief in the unique creation of each person by God that led the Kansans of history to see beyond black and white, slave and free, to see the image of God in each man, woman, and child, and thus to see an attack on the freedom of one as an attack on the freedom of all.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminded us of a similar truth regarding abortion, "If we can accept that a mother can kill her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?"

So we must acknowledge every person as created in God's image. Yet, I think that we need more than this. It is not enough to merely recognize this truth. Our Kansas ancestors not only understood the injustice of denying this truth, they were also moved to do something about it. At the risk of oversimplifying, I will refer to this condition that moved them to action as "compassion."

Compassion means that I can understand the pain of another. Eisenhower took pictures because he wanted people to be able to feel the pain of the concentration camps. He gave us pictures that were enough to move us to action, to do something about the injustice.

There is much pain involved in abortion. People often accuse pro-life people of only caring about the baby and not caring for the mother. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I was attending seminary I would often spend Saturday mornings doing sidewalk counseling at one of the abortion mills in the inner city of Chicago. I can assure that I never met a woman who was there because she felt somehow "empowered" to make a "choice." The women I met were normally frightened, alone, and in pain.

If we're going to talk about abortion, we have to first make sure that we really try to understand the pain that would lead a woman to such a desperate action. Compassion for that pain can help us to respond with the heartfelt compassion and understanding that is always lacking in the life of one seeking an abortion. The Christian Scriptures teach us that God became one of us. One of the great conclusions of this is that God came to show us that he knows our pain. We therefore most beautifully image God when we are able to recognize the pain of another and respond with compassion.

The same compassion that causes us to recognize the pain in the mother and stir us to help her must also help us recognize the pain of the baby. Science has shown us that babies have a fully developed network of pain receptors by no later than the 20th week of pregnancy. Yet, they have not of the pain suppressors that only develop closer to and even after birth. Anesthesiologists who specialize in fetal

surgeries report that babies feel pain almost 5 times as powerful as you and I with our all our fully developed pain suppressors. Can we feel this pain? Will compassion move us to action?

The sad truth is that today, groups march in protest against fishing because fish feel pain and yet little thought is giving to babies undergoing abortion. While we provide no anesthesia to babies being torn apart in an abortion, we have instead anesthetized our consciences. We often do not feel the pain of the baby or the mother or the often forgotten father and other relatives and friends who are also touched.

In the Bible we often encounter people with the disease of leprosy. Part of this disease is that it interferes with the ability of the body to feel pain and the victim ends up inflicting devastating wounds to their body without the ability to feel it and know to stop. It seems that this describes well our present situation. If we fail to empathize with the pain of abortion, to really feel it, we won't do anything about it and we will continue to disfigure ourselves to the point of destruction.

On a positive note, the latest Gallup polls show that this message is getting out. For the first time since Roe vs. Wade, a majority of Americans identify themselves as pro-life. This is wonderful news. It means we are starting to win the battle in the area of knowledge. The question then is, do we have the will to act on this, to do something about it?

You're here today and that says something. Last week over a thousand young people Marched from the performing arts center to the statehouse where they gathered in peaceful assembly in support of life and this time, praise God, our governor was there to address us and march with us. Around a half a million more marched in Washington, D.C. But, you know, when those marches ended something struck me this year. While it was wonderful to see the outpouring we immediately began planning for next year's march. It struck me that, at some point, these marches have to end. We actually have to do something about it.

Certainly we'll keep marching, and we should. But we pray also for the dawning of a new day, that so much of what we've seen here in Kansas and in the House of Representatives in Washington with continue to play itself out as there is bright hope for a new future. Indeed, many people on the pro-abortion side would love to see us stop marching, that we would go away. That has been the message ever since Roe vs. Wade. They continue to taunt us, "Don't you realize that this is 'settled law?'"

Well, here in Kansas we know a thing or two about settling. You see my great, great, great, grandfather came here to Kansas in a wagon, picked himself out an empty patch prairie near Leavenworth and he settled it. There's a good reason why our state motto is "Ad astra per aspera," "To the stars through difficulties." We in Kansas know that to settle something requires great struggle and difficulty. In all of history, if ever there was a law that was going to be settled it seems that Kansas had something to say about it and we settled it. It's time that we settle things once again.

The good news is that we don't fight this battle alone. We know that God is on our side. We fight in his grace and his strength. His Holy Spirit confirms us and gives us the wisdom, the knowledge, the understanding, the courage to stand up for what we believe, to truly make a difference. This latest battle is just the latest one in a war that began long ago when Stan first told God, "I will not serve." In

Kansas we fight proudly with God on our side, to do our part to ensure that, in the end, life will be victorious. We know that this is the case, and so as we continue to take up the banner and Kansans did of old we fight. We fight for what is right. We fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. And so, trusting in Almighty God we pray:

Heavenly Father, you have created every human person in your image and likeness. In your great providence you allowed the United States of America to come about, and our great state of Kansas, 150 years ago today. You have showered your blessings upon us and many times we have not given you fitting thanks. We pray today that you would change the hearts and minds of all those who would turn to abortion as a supposed solution. Give us the courage to help those most in need, especially those women who feel they have no one else to turn to. May the good people of Kansas always rise to the occasion. In history, we had a special part to play. You chose to use Kansas to bring about your will. We pray, Almighty God, that you would use Kansas again, that once again, Kansas must lead. We ask all this in your holy name. Amen