



Written by on April 1, 2009

## Terri Schiavo Remembered

The special memorial Mass was hosted by Ave Maria University in Florida in cooperation with the Terri Schindler Schiavo Foundation and Priests for Life, who last year jointly established an "International Day of Prayer and Remembrance" — and, also, "Terri's Day" — in honor of the young woman whose case received international attention. The Ave Maria Oratory is shared by the conservative Catholic university and the adjacent planned community of the same name.



As the Schindler family filed into the pew saved for them, this writer recognized them immediately, having seen them previously. I was moved by the poignant sadness that is still apparent in Terri's parents, Bob and Mary Schindler. They were accompanied by their son, Bobby Schindler, and daughter, Suzanne Vitadamo.

Suzanne delivered the first reading for the Mass, a passage from the book of Numbers, wherein the Israelites complained to Moses about the lack of food and water in the desert and the bite of the serpents.

In his homily, Father Pavone noted that any society that says to its vulnerable members — whether unborn or disabled — "You're disposable," has turned away from God. He warned that if we claim the right to control the circumstances of our own death, as some want, then others will claim the right to bring death to us.

Answering the rhetorical question: "Why focus on one person?" Pavone said that when you break the respect, sanctity, and dignity of human life for any one person, you have broken it for everyone.

Delivering a direct challenge to anti-life lawmakers, Pavone said that any law or decree that denies the right of human life lacks all validity and authority. He said we have no obligation to obey any law that tramples on human life.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Father Pavone shared some reflections about Terri's last days, when he was invited by the Schindler family to stand by her bedside. Many of his remarks are found in a flyer published by Priests for Life entitled "Terri Schiavo's Final Hours." He denies that Terri was in a non-responsive, "vegetative" state and witnessed her interaction with family members on many occasions. Pavone said that as Terri neared death, he chanted an ancient Latin hymn, *Victimae Paschali Laudis* — the ancient proclamation of the resurrection of Christ — by her bedside. Translating a few phrases of the Latin into English, he quoted from the hymn: "Life and death were locked in a wondrous struggle." "Life's Captain died, but now lives and reigns forevermore!"



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Father Pavone chanted the hymn in its entirety before the assembled congregation.

Priests for Life is a movement of priests seeking to help the Catholic Church mobilize against what it describes as "the most devastating attacks on human life in our day." Besides being the organization's founder, Father Pavone is a priest of the Amarillo Diocese and serves full-time in pro-life leadership. He served as a spiritual adviser to the Schindler family during the darkest days of their ordeal. He is an outspoken native New Yorker not prone to sugarcoating his statements.

On the occasion of George W. Greer being honored with the Special Justice Award by Florida's West Pasco Bar Association on May 05, 2005, Pavone said: "On the night before Terri Schiavo died, I said to the national media that Judge Greer was a murderer. I repeat that today. I use the word not in its legal meaning but in its moral meaning, that is, a deliberate action or series of actions that intentionally kill an innocent person."

The Terri Schindler Schiavo Foundation ("Terri's Foundation") was established by Bob and Mary Schindler, Suzanne Schindler Vitadamo, and Bobby Schindler as a nonprofit group dedicated to helping persons with disabilities and the incapacitated who are in or potentially facing life-threatening situations.

In an interview with Liam Dillon of the *Naples Daily News*, Bobby Schindler said that previous memorial services for his sister have been held near the family's St. Petersburg-area home. However, this year, Schindler wanted to expand the event to bring the cause for protecting the lives of the infirm to a national audience. So he approached Ave Maria University founder Thomas Monaghan about having the Mass at its 1,100-seat oratory.

"Ave Maria is well respected throughout the country," said Schindler. "It's a prestigious university. Mr. Monaghan is a leader in the pro-life movement and has been very supportive of us. We are honored he would allow us to have our Mass at Ave Maria."

Back in the 1980s, Monaghan's support for pro-life organizations such as Operation Rescue spurred a boycott of the Domino's Pizza chain he founded, headed by pro-abortion organizations including the National Organization of Women (NOW).

Speaking with OneNewsNow.com, Schindler observed: "It certainly is a sad day. March 31 will mark the fourth year of Terri's death by dehydration, and there's really not a day that doesn't go by where our family doesn't think of Terri."

"More importantly now is that there are other lives that are in jeopardy of being killed the way Terri's was," he continued. "Our family fights every day for other families faced with similar circumstances. This issue did not die with my sister."

As we left the Ave Maria Oratory, a member of the news media approached and asked several of us our views on issues such as abortion and euthanasia. I told the reporters that I viewed the battle as principally a moral one, and that our political leaders show no courage in defending life because the people do not have the moral courage to exert sufficient pressure on them. I gave my opinion that if we restore morality to our culture, our people will then exert more pressure on our leaders to do the right thing.

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