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Three events of the past week have inspired this weekend's reflection. Monday was the holiday commemorating the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King; Friday was the anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision; and the devastation in Haiti and last weekend's presentation by Deacon George Anderberg of Food for the Poor. All of these recent events have brought to mind the principles which led to the foundation of our nation. *"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal ...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights ... Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted...."*

It would take 13 years (more than three Presidential terms, by today's standards) before a government would "instituted" with the intention of securing these rights. "Fourscore and seven years" later, President Lincoln reiterated that proposition of equality and questioned whether such a nation could endure in the midst of a civil war. It would be 1868 before that government would begin to address the equality of "all men," "regardless of race, color or previous condition of servitude." And it was more than fifty years after that, before women began to be included in the security that government was supposed to provide. Yet in spite of the principles of 1776 and the institution of those principles in the Constitution and its amendments, obstacles to "the blessings of liberty," the right to life and the pursuit of happiness continue to exist.

The thirteenth amendment abolished slavery. The fourteenth granted the rights of citizenship and "the equal protection of the laws" to all persons born or naturalized in the United States and, in effect, raised the status of the Negro from three fifths of a person to a whole person. And the fifteenth amendment specifically guaranteed that the right of those citizens to vote "shall not be denied or abridged." Yet Dr. King recognized that these measures were not enough to secure those "unalienable rights" of liberty and the pursuit of happiness in a society plagued by racism. It would take more than amendments and laws to change the heart of a society. In his efforts to build a more just society, Dr. King lost his life. Progress has been made, but the struggle for justice continues. Race, color, creed, gender, age, and national origin are still factors limiting the realization of those self-evident truths.

The struggle to protect, defend, and extend protection for the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness has been a long one and is not over yet. Similarly, the struggle to protect the right to life at all its stages goes on. The principles are clear. The application and implementation of those principles remains a long, slow, tedious and often "messy" process. Along the way, mistakes get made and successes are incomplete. Even then, it will take more than laws, amendments and court decisions to

replace the “culture of death” with a culture of life. Securing the right to life will involve providing alternatives to abortion, abuse, violence, war, and euthanasia. Preventing the evil is only half of the job. The other half is accomplished by supporting mothers and children, teaching and practicing conflict resolution, endorsing diplomacy, providing health care to sustain life. Time and again, our government and the people of our nation have had to confront and overcome limitations to the rights that all people were “endowed by their Creator with.” Twice in its history, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that a group of human beings were not entitled to the government’s protection of their “unalienable rights.” History, progress and common sense proved the Dred Scott decision wrong. With continued prayer and pressure, future generations may be able to say the same about Roe v. Wade. I have posted more of my thoughts about this issue on the “Reflections” page of our parish website or at www.stgermaine.com/pdf/RoeAnalysis.pdf.

When the authors of the Declaration of Independence professed those self-evident truths, they were not limiting their application to the residents of those thirteen colonies. They directed their appeal to the citizens of the world. It makes sense then to extend the protection and support for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to all members of our human family. Although human frailty and sinfulness can sometimes “become destructive” of these rights, natural forces can also play a part. The earthquake in Haiti has demonstrated that. In his moving and impassioned presentation, Deacon George Anderberg reminded us that our duty to support the struggle for life and the pursuit of happiness extends beyond our borders, especially to those who live not only on the edges of society, but on the very edge of survival as well. On behalf of Deacon Anderberg, Food for the Poor, and especially the people of Haiti, I am grateful for the response and outpouring of support our parish gave to this effort.