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New pro-life Mass wins overwhelming vote by bishops

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In a signal of the U.S. bishops' strong commitment to the pro-life cause, they approved this morning a text for a new "Mass in Thanksgiving for the Gift of Human Life." Among other things, the Mass is to be celebrated each year on Jan. 22, the anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

If Jan 22nd falls on a Sunday, the observance will be moved to Jan. 23. The proposal to approve the Mass passed by a vote of 183 to 3 this morning during the bishops' June 17-19 spring meeting.

The text requires approval from the Vatican before it becomes official.

The lone bishop who rose to discuss the "Mass in Thanksgiving for the Gift of Human Life" was Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, New Mexico, who said that it had long been a "source of wonderment" among his priests that there is no Mass in defense of unborn life.

"We have Masses for fair weather, for earthquakes, for prisoners, but nothing for ending abortion," Sheehan said, urging support of the proposal.

During a brief presentation of the Mass yesterday, Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson, New Jersey, chair of the bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, said that the U.S. bishops had initially asked the Vatican to consider a Mass in defense of human life during the 1990s. The reply was that the idea was "interesting," Serratelli said, but nothing further came of it.

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