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Bishop Michael Burbidge ([00:00](#)):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

Billy Atwell ([00:08](#)):

Podcasting from the St. Clare Studio here in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly podcast. I'm Billy Atwell, Chief Communications Officer for the Diocese and your co-host. We want to begin, especially in this new year, thanking those who have made this podcast possible in previous years. And I'm speaking about those who have given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal. The BLA, as we call it, supports a lot of ministries in this diocese, Catholic education, Catholic Charities, vocations, pro-life ministry and many others, but it also includes the Communications Office, so we're thankful for all your continued support. If you haven't yet, please rate this podcast or write a review wherever you're listening from.

([00:44](#)):

And if you're listening through YouTube, please subscribe to our YouTube channel and ring that notification bell. Sign up for our e-newsletter at arlingtondiocese.org. You can follow Bishop Burbidge on Twitter @bishopburbidge, where every day he provides a short Gospel reflection for that day. The Diocese is on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, as you might suspect. And you can send your questions to Bishop Burbidge. Send them to info@arlingtondiocese.org, or you can send us a message on social media. I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how are you doing?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([01:14](#)):

I am doing well, Billy. I hope you and all of our listeners are doing well, and certainly extending to everyone my prayers for a blessed new year filled with Our Lord's peace and abundant spiritual gifts. So Happy New Year everyone.

Billy Atwell ([01:28](#)):

Bishop, I want to begin with a very pertinent topic, specifically here in the Church, and that's that Pope Benedict has passed away. He passed away on December 31st, 2022 at the age of 95. With his advanced age it wasn't a complete surprise, but naturally has brought a lot of mourning within the Church among Catholics, as he was so well regarded as a priest, an archbishop, cardinal and certainly a very intellectual pope who offered us many great things. What was your response to when he passed?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([01:55](#)):

Well, certainly, Billy, as you said, we're united with the universal Church in thanking God for the gift and the life; the witness of Pope Benedict XVI. As priests, as bishop, as pope, we are united with the Church in praying for his eternal peace, commending him to God's infinite love and divine mercy. But what a blessing, what a gift to the universal Church, a faithful, loyal servant. And I know he will continue to be an inspiration for all of us.

Billy Atwell ([02:27](#)):

Very good. What was your experience with him? Every bishop has a relationship with the Pope, obviously. It is through his authority that you're a bishop. But did you get to meet him and talk to him at all?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([02:37](#)):

Well, he was the pope who appointed me the Bishop of Raleigh in North Carolina. So that was the first time I became an ordinary of a diocese. So I wrote, expressing my thanks to him for having that confidence. I did meet Pope Benedict during one of the ad limina visits. And what we saw in him from the first moment he was introduced to the world as pope was a serenity and a gentle, joyful spirit. And that was really obvious when you met with him one-on-one. And he just had a warm smile. He looked you right in the eye as if you were the only person in the room. And I really left just truly inspired by his humility, grateful for the encouragement that he offered. And it was just a privileged moment in my life just to have... It was only for a few moments, but just a privilege to have greeted him.

[\(03:41\)](#):

And we celebrate, I mean, just one of the greatest theologians ever to be elected pope. I think that's what he's known for. I think he's known and will always be known for his intellectual clarity and pastoral charity. Everyone, I think, knew Pope Benedict as a strong, rightfully so, teacher of the Faith. Clearly articulated it so well. But always with a pastoral heart. And that was revealed in his first encyclical letter to the people of God. It was called, "God is Love." And of all the topics that he could write on, such a great professor and intellect, he wanted to stress that God is love. Yes, we find life by being faithful to God's commands and following the teachings and the doctrines of the Church.

[\(04:36\)](#):

But most especially in relationship with the Lord. And it's only when we are convinced, as he would say so often, of the Lord's intimate love for each one of us, even in the midst of our limitations, our weaknesses. Only when we are convinced of that will we really be able to love one another as brothers and sisters. So I really think this is a great invitation for all of us to go back and certainly read that encyclical, but also the works of Pope Benedict. I think we should reacquaint ourselves. They're so rich, such a source of inspiration, including his series on Jesus of Nazareth. That is just spectacular.

Billy Atwell [\(05:15\)](#):

Absolutely. And like you said, they're so accessible. Everyone listening will understand what he's saying and be able to pick it up. This isn't written for seminary professors. He wrote it for the faithful.

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(05:24\)](#):

I would also say I would love to have had him in class because he's just so clear. 1, 2, 3, and repeat. And now you know. So he was just a great teacher and professor.

Billy Atwell [\(05:35\)](#):

Each pope is remembered for something. And you've already spoken about a couple of the things, but is there anything else in the long arc of history that you think will be his lasting impact?

Bishop Michael Burbidge [\(05:45\)](#):

Well, he was a profound governor within the Church. He was instrumental in helping St. John Paul II during his pontificate. I mean, one of, if not the closest advisor to John Paul II, Benedict was critical to the Second Vatican Council. He initiated reforms regarding canonical procedures related to sexual abuse by priests, and also financial reforms. So he governed during a very challenging time in the life of the Church, and he made sure things changed to the best of his ability. If I were to pick one thing that would stand out among all his gifts, it would be his theological teachings, particularly those on Jesus Christ. And so I think they would be some of the great qualities to highlight.

Billy Atwell ([06:32](#)):

That's wonderful. And you mentioned your meeting with him. And people will see a pope, and especially if you're not Catholic or if you weren't familiar with that individual's priestly life before that, you think that they were kind of born into the papacy. But they were a bishop before so they know the practical challenges that a bishop faces. John Paul II, certainly Benedict, and now Francis, they all know how hard it is to be a bishop. I would imagine that creates a personal connection with them, even if you didn't talk to them regularly or anything.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([07:01](#)):

Well, sure. When he would write letters to priests or to bishops, you could tell he just had that concern, a fraternal concern, and offer the word of encouragement it seemed like you needed to hear that day or whatever. And I think he teaches us lessons to apply to our own lives, our own spiritual lives. I would say there's three, I think. One is, don't forget, he was not anticipating becoming pope. And the Holy Spirit, as the spirit of God so often does, surprised him. But he did what he did throughout his entire life. He surrendered and he said yes to God's will and trusted that God would provide. And then the second lesson is, he always mentioned that we must teach the truth without compromise, but always in love.

([07:45](#)):

I mean, he would say that love without the truth is blind, and truth without love is like a clanging symbol. So the truth in love. And so I think all of us, as we try to share our faith with others, to realize those two are inseparable, truth and love. It's like clarity and charity. And thirdly, in his becoming Pope Emeritus, I think he showed to all of us that there is never a moment, there is never a stage in our lives when we cannot be extremely productive. And it may not be in this way that we anticipate it or in the active "doing", but Pope Francis said that in his retirement as pope, Pope Francis sustained the Church through his-

Billy Atwell ([08:37](#)):

Pope Benedict, yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([08:38](#)):

Pope Benedict, yeah. Pope Francis said Pope Benedict sustained the Church through his commitment to prayer, penance, writing and offering his sufferings, his crosses for the Church he loved. And so for all of us, no matter what stage we're in, in life, we are always productive if what we're doing, how we're living and embracing each day is united to the Lord. And Pope Benedict just was a beautiful, beautiful example of that.

Billy Atwell ([09:07](#)):

Well, thank you for that. That was a wonderful reflection. Bishop, a couple of tragedies have taken place in Buffalo and that surrounding area in New York. And I'll start with the first, which was a blizzard which took the lives of an estimated 40 people to this point in Erie County, New York following the blizzard. Many people were cut off from emergency services and many were trapped in their cars and even passed away there. It's really tragic. I was wondering if you might comment on that.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([09:30](#)):

Yeah, very, very tragic, as you mentioned. I join Bishop Fisher, who's the bishop of Buffalo in praying for the victims of the storm and their families. It almost seems unimaginable. And friends whose family are

in Buffalo and shared some of the photos. And it's unbelievable to witness what they have gone through. And we have so many means to protect us from elements, but sometimes these natural forces are too much to bear. So I know with all of our listeners, heartfelt condolences to everyone who's suffering the loss of a family member or friend due to that terrible storm.

Billy Atwell ([10:05](#)):

Yeah. This past weekend during the Buffalo Bills and the Cincinnati Bengals football game, defensive player Damar Hamlin collapsed on the field from cardiac arrest and everyone was just stunned. CPR was performed, but he was rushed to the hospital in critical condition. His situation has sadly not improved even days later. The team keeps putting out updates, but there's really not anything new.

([10:28](#)):

But one thing I want to ask you about this in particular, and see if you noticed this, was that in the immediate aftermath, within seconds, the natural response of coaches, players, TV commentators, the Buffalo Bills administration, everybody, was to respond by praying. Not well wishes or kind words or thoughts, but everyone was on their knees and praying. And this was said over the airwaves many times. Is that something that you noticed?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([10:53](#)):

Yeah, I noticed. I mean, as you know, I love watching sports so I was watching that game. And never, I'm sure everyone says the same, never have we seen anything like that, with that ambulance on the field and the television going to breaks, commercials, coming back, and it was the same scene, nothing changed. So you knew this was like nothing we've ever seen before. And our hearts and prayers, as you mentioned, do go out to that young man and his family and all his teammates. And people who love him were praying so fervently for him. But I did notice the same thing as you did, Billy, is no one hesitated. No one hesitated to say, "We're praying, our prayers go out." And I mean, that's who we are. We respond to such tragedies or times of need with immediate prayer. It's what we're supposed to do.

([11:49](#)):

We believe in the efficacy of prayer. And even those who have lost faith or do not practice faith often find themselves pointing to God in times of distress. We're human and we're in relationship with someone who is more powerful, all-powerful. I think we're wired this way. We're made for a relationship with God. And we saw it play out. No one prepared for that moment. No one thought, okay, well, if this happens, what will we do? It just was spontaneous because it's who we are. And sadly, you don't want a tragedy to remind us that we're merely human and we're completely dependent and must rely on God's power and God's healing. And he teaches us, he teaches us. The Lord taught us to pray and to turn to our Father in our time of need with the assurance that no prayer will go unanswered.

([12:47](#)):

The Lord will give us what we need in accordance with his holy will. So hopefully it's not only tragedies that remind us that we must be a people who pray for specific needs, who pray for one another and who come together as brothers and sisters in Christ. That's another thing that we've seen. But pray God it doesn't take a tragedy to realize that we must be there to do good for one another. And so you saw, it did not matter what color uniform anyone was wearing or anything like that. It was human beings united for another brother and consulting one another and encouraging one another. And I even heard of the great charitable works that have come from this, supporting this young man's charity who wanted to buy toys for children in his community in which he grew up.

([13:43](#)):

So sometimes, again, we don't want it to be a tragedy to remind us, but we are reminded at this moment, we are meant to pray. God hears our prayers. We're meant to console, encourage one another and to come together just in life. Wouldn't it be wonderful that we have competing ideas, just like teams compete against one another, but in the end, all that matters is that we just love God and one another? And we saw that displayed in this tragic moment.

Billy Atwell ([14:16](#)):

You're absolutely right, yeah. Bishop, this is a busy month as most months are for you. I can't think of a month for you that's not too busy, but somehow the beginning of the year always seems particularly busy. That's in part because of the March for Life and the surrounding pro-life events that take place.

([14:30](#)):

You have a new role as the chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, so you'll be the celebrant and homilist for the Vigil Mass for Life at the Basilica Shrine that's televised and well-publicized. You've been to that Mass many times in the past though, so how do you feel now that you'll be the one actually offering that pastoral message? Usually you get to go and attend. A little less pressure, of course. Now that you'll be celebrating that mass and preaching, how are you approaching it?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([14:54](#)):

Extremely nervous. Thanks for adding to the pressure, Billy. Thanks for describing that scene so well.

Billy Atwell ([15:02](#)):

I'll remind you that day too.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([15:05](#)):

Yeah, because it's a beautiful scene at the Basilica Shrine. Every year I've attended is standing room only, with mostly young people from around the country and the Apostolic Nuncio and the cardinals and brother bishops and priests, seminarians.

Billy Atwell ([15:28](#)):

Will they offer you corrections in the sacristy?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([15:31](#)):

I'm sure they're taking notes. And like you said, nationally televised. But I mean, it's a humbling, privileged moment, I see it as. And I'm just praying to God that he will give me the words that I need to preach that evening on behalf of the Gospel of Life in protecting the pre-born and upholding the dignity of each and every human person at every stage of life. So I would be grateful if our listeners would also say a little prayer for that homily that I'm preparing as we speak.

([16:07](#)):

Also, earlier that day, I would be preaching to Respect Life leaders from around the country. There's a Mass at which I'm celebrant and homilist earlier in that day. The next day, the 20th, I'll be here at the Cathedral, our cathedral, before we go to the March for Life. And then I'll be on the platform at the March for Life in our nation's capital to offer the opening prayer. So in this new role, it is truly a

humbling, privileged moment and gives me the opportunity to represent my brother bishops in proclaiming our steadfast commitment to the sanctity, the sacredness, and protecting all of human life.

Billy Atwell ([16:51](#)):

This is a unique year. You mentioned that you'll be speaking to pro-life leaders. This is a landscape many of them have never faced, because Roe v. Wade has been around for 50 years and so many of them began their careers and ministry well after that point. What do you think changes for them? Is there any shift in thinking for us as we go into this post-Dobbs era?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([17:13](#)):

Yeah, that's a good point. I think first we need to celebrate the end of this 50-year battle to undo the damage of Roe v. Wade and give thanks for the people of God who for all these years prayed rosaries outside of clinics, marched peacefully, those who have gone before us, now home to God. Just think of all the people who have persevered through all these years. So we need to celebrate the end of this 50-year battle.

([17:43](#)):

We need to think of ourselves not living in a post-Roe era, but instead a post-Dobbs era. And what I mean by that, this is a new time, it's a new opportunity. Roe is over. We must think differently. Like you say, we have to think differently than we did before. We cannot engage our political activities and ministries in the same way. Now that states can decide abortion legislation for themselves without federal roadblocks, we must begin a new strategy rather than looking to the old playbook.

Billy Atwell ([18:13](#)):

Yeah, it's a different landscape.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([18:14](#)):

Every state based on its own need and opportunities will have a different strategy and game plan. We're working really closely here with the Virginia Catholic Conference. And all of us have a role to play, so please everyone reach out and give a hand and continue your prayer, your advocacy, your witness. Be with us on the day of prayer in Richmond, February 1st. And lastly, no matter what is occurring locally, this is the moment we need to shape hearts and minds on the issue of life. No Supreme Court decision changes people's minds.

Billy Atwell ([18:49](#)):

That's true. Yeah, that's true.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([18:50](#)):

It only clarifies what is constitutional. So we must continue to reveal the reality of the child in the womb, advocate for them, speak up for the mothers who need our help and have been wounded by the pain of abortion. I think we also need to... We're humble. We do ministry. We do works of charity. Not for any credit, we do it for the glory of God and in service to one another. But I think sometimes we have to do a better job in proclaiming to others who may not be aware, may disagree and reject us, that we are for life, we're for the mom, we're for the child. And that's why we walk with moms in need. And that's why we have Project Gabriel providing basic necessities for families who cannot maybe have the financial resources that they need.

(19:43):

Project Rachel, healing mothers and fathers who chose abortion. Adoption services where someone can bring a child into the world. And we don't want any mother or father to think that they can't bring a child in the world because they'll be so alone. They won't be alone. And we as the Catholic Church will stand with them and walk with them. And that's through the goodness of so many people. So we are pro-life, we are pro-mother, we are pro-child. We will walk with mothers and fathers in need.

Billy Atwell (20:09):

Excellent. And just to run down some of those events that Bishop Burbidge mentioned, the National Prayer Vigil for Life, within that is the Mass that Bishop Burbidge had mentioned. That's going to be Thursday, January 19th at 5:00 PM. It's going to be live streamed from the National Shrine's website, so nationalshrine.org/mass. After Mass, there's a Holy Hour that's held through 8:00 PM. On the day of the march, that's Friday, January 20th, there's a pre-rally concert for those who show up from 11:00 AM to 12:00. That's a good way to get the kids involved and excited and get some energy going.

(20:40):

There's a rally. Bishop Burbidge will speak at that rally with a number of other major figures. That'll be 12:00 PM to 1:00. And then the March for Life begins at 1:00 PM and goes till about 4:00 PM. Bishop, on the pro-life issue, the FDA announced loosened safety requirements for pharmacies. This change included the ability of a pharmacy to distribute a chemical abortion drug. I'm going to probably mispronounce the name, but I'll give it my best, it's mifepristone, something like that, through a certification process by prescription. I know you're going to be issuing a statement through the USCCB, but I'm asking you to give us the scoop here. What are your thoughts on this?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (21:20):

Yeah, it's very sad. It's very, very sad. This administration continues to push for the destruction of innocent human lives and the loosening of vital safety standards for vulnerable women. That's what's happening. And it's exactly the opposite of their mandate as public servants. Yesterday's action by the FDA not only advances, Billy, the obvious tragedy of taking the lives of the pre-born but is also harmful to women in need. Chemical abortions already account, we know, for more than half of all abortions in the United States. And with the FDA's decision, they are tragically likely to become more prevalent. So the rate of serious complications also after chemical abortion are considerably higher than after surgical abortion.

Billy Atwell (22:02):

You don't hear that reporting.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (22:06):

I know. And this is factual. And overturning the safety protocols around abortion-causing drugs, effectively making them available on demand at pharmacies and requiring no in-person medical supervision leads to isolation of critically vulnerable pregnant women and invites more pain and more trauma. And we also know that this pill is widely used with women who are trafficked or in abusive relationships.

Billy Atwell (22:29):

I've heard that as well.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([22:31](#)):

So it may also result in violations of conscience for pharmacy workers who cannot dispense such drugs. The FDA should protect life and health. That's why they exist. Both of mothers and children and not loosen safety standards under industry or political pressures. Mothers in need deserve better. So I will be issuing a statement tomorrow. I'll be issuing a statement in my role as USCCB chair on this very issue.

Billy Atwell ([23:02](#)):

I spoke with Therese Bermpohl, who runs our Respect Life Office. And she had mentioned something to me, and she implored that we mentioned this on the podcast, that for those who have taken the pill and regret it, and this is not an uncommon issue, that there is an effective process called the abortion pill reversal, which may allow a woman to bring a baby to term. There's something like a 64 to 68% success rate in initial studies. If you're in that situation or you know someone that may be there's a help line.

([23:31](#)):

It's (877) 558-0333. And time is of the essence with that. The earlier the better. Again, that's (877) 558-0333. At least call in and hear them out. They've got great information on that. But thank you, Bishop for addressing this. It's a really important public issue. We have a question from one of our parishioners, and it's a question I have never even pondered before, so I'm hoping you're ready for it. It says this, "In addition to diocesan priests, there are priests in religious orders. It seems that religious sisters only serve in religious orders. We have diocesan priests but not diocesan sisters. Why is that?" I've never even considered that.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([24:18](#)):

It's a good question, it really is. It's an interesting question. There actually can be an order of religious sisters who are assigned as a diocesan order. And so typically the intent of the order would to become independent and serve outside of a particular diocese. Many orders are founded by a bishop because of a need in his diocese, but this doesn't happen often. So most religious orders, they're founded on a charism, by their founders and maybe education, maybe healthcare ministry or whatever, all of it includes a variety of ministries. But it's the charism that is attractive to that religious community.

([24:55](#)):

And then that service upon entering the community would be not to a local church, not to a local diocese, but anywhere. And for some, it's anywhere in the country. For some, it's anything in the world. But to find an order that is a diocesan order, first of all, a bishop cannot do that on his own. He actually has to write to the Holy Father to do so. And I know that permission needs to be granted. The only, Billy, the only order I can think of right now that's a diocesan order, are the Sisters of Life.

Billy Atwell ([25:32](#)):

Oh, they were founded that way. That's right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([25:33](#)):

They were founded by Cardinal O'Connor in New York. So I believe that they are a diocesan order. Now they do ministry outside the Archdiocese of New York, I believe. And so it's very uncommon, because it is the charism, it's the sense of community, it's the sense of mission that sends religious forth. But there is a process for that. But it does go through the Holy See, actually, to the Holy Father.

Billy Atwell ([26:00](#)):

That's interesting. And I would assume that's probably because the idea is that it would eventually become independent like the Sisters of Life and that they would function as a religious order would otherwise.

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([26:09](#)):

But let me take the opportunity, though, to thank God for blessing our diocese. We have a number of women religious communities serving in our diocese, and we are truly blessed by the presence of women religious. Such a faithful witness, such generous service offered. And we have a number of such communities and even two cloistered communities. So we are truly blessed. I'm so grateful to our sisters. As some of our listeners may know, the sisters in this Year Two in our diocese devoted to Mary and to rejoice, have written beautiful reflections on the Rosary. They're written by the sisters who serve in our community. So hope people are able to get that.

Billy Atwell ([26:57](#)):

Yeah. If you go to jubilee.arlingtondiocese.org, we have prayer resources there. One of them is this Rosary booklet. And we've published it in a format where you can print it off on a home printer or you can send it to a printer if you'd like to get it done professionally. But we made it so that everybody has access to it. You could also download it to your phone and read it right from there. But yeah, it takes you through the Rosary, especially if you're not really acquainted with the Rosary or it's been a while.

([27:20](#)):

It walks you through the process of how to pray the Rosary. But a reflection for each of the mysteries written by a sister of our diocese is such a blessing. Everyone we've given one to or told about the links, they've been so happy with it. So I encourage you to go and check that out. Bishop, we're in a new year, as I said, so people are adjusting to 2023. They're writing it on letters and things and still getting used to that. Spiritually, what are your recommendations for us as we close out the podcast here?

Bishop Michael Burbidge ([27:46](#)):

Sure. Well, a new year is a reminder that God always gives us new life. God always gives us the opportunity to rise, to begin anew. Things don't have to stay the same. We can continue to do all the good things that we've been doing and striving our best. But any time that we have to make improvements or where we have failed, God gives us a new beginning. So I would say to all of our listeners, look upon this new year as an opportunity for new life, new blessings that await you, and live it. New Year's resolutions are hard. New Year's resolution's are a long time, a year's resolution. I just try to live them day by day. What is it this day that God is asking of you? And don't try to live out your resolution, whether it's spiritually, physically, emotionally, whatever, without God's grace.

([28:43](#)):

We need the grace of God. We can't just, all of a sudden, I make up my mind and now I resolve, "This is what I'm going to do". Well, it begins with that, but it's only completed and it bears fruition through the grace of God. And so call upon God's help and Mary's intercession. And I do wish, Billy, everyone a very happy, blessed new year. Together may we walk humbly with our God.

([29:06](#)):

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