



First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2015

Pastor's Column

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Advent—the Season of Hope

As we begin this Season of Advent, as we await the Second Coming of Jesus, we prepare to celebrate his First Coming as the Babe in Bethlehem on Christmas Day.

We are mindful that God was and is faithful to the promises that were made to our Ancestors in the Faith.

This fulfillment of promises makes us a hope-filled people and helps us to do what, at times, we think is impossible.

“Maybe everyone can live beyond what they are capable of” (Markus Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*). This is the meaning of hope!

This is a thought to ponder as we reflect upon the recently passed “Physician-assisted Suicide” law in California. Is such a law necessary? Do we not hope and believe that God will give us the strength and endurance to face our final days? Do we not hope and believe that God will see us through? Do we not hope and believe that with modern medical assistance we can be kept relatively safe from pain and suffering in our final days? Is it necessary to cut life short to avoid what is unknown, believing that it will be without dignity and beyond our control to endure?

I share with you thoughts from Bishop Robert McElroy, the Bishop of the Diocese of San Diego:

As Catholics our teachings on the end of life respond to both the needs of the dying and those accompanying them. We should all promote the prudent and responsible exercise of patient autonomy during a patient’s last days. Those who are dying should experience the embrace of family, quality palliative care, and love. All of those grappling with the loss of a loved one should be offered spiritual solace and grace-filled consolation. Our Catholic health care providers offer this effective and compassionate care throughout our state.

Sadly this new law creates a medical and social reality in civil society that expands a “throw-away culture” mentality to an unprecedented level placing in peril our most vulnerable sisters and brothers in California. California stands at a perilous juncture in our history and what we do here may also negatively influence others in our nation.

Concerned citizens have filed a referendum to ask voters to overturn this dismal law. To succeed it must first receive enough signatures by January 4, 2016, to qualify for the ballot...

Since the legislature passed the physician-assisted suicide bill in a special session, it will not take effect until the session is adjourned—which has not yet been determined. Should the referendum receive enough signatures, the law will be prevented from going into effect until after the voters have had their say in November 2016...

The effort to legalize a doctor writing prescriptions for a lethal dose of drugs highlights the “throw-away culture” Pope Francis has warned us against. In speaking to Italian doctors last year, His Holiness spoke clearly of the dangers of such a policy:

“The dominant thinking sometimes suggests a false compassion, that which believes that it is: helpful to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to obtain euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to produce a child and to consider it to be a right rather than a gift to welcome; or to use human lives as guinea pigs presumably to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is that which accompanies in times of need, that is, the compassion of the Good Samaritan, who sees, has compassion, approaches and provides concrete help (Luke 10:33). Your mission as doctors puts you in daily contact with many forms of suffering. I encourage you to take them on as Good Samaritans, caring in a special way for the elderly, the infirm and the disabled.”

By putting this referendum on the ballot we can educate our own Catholic community to understand the beauty of our Catholic teaching and the dire consequences that this sad practice will inflict on individuals and their families. We can keep it from becoming law and advocate better alternatives for end-of-life care. As we have seen on other health issues of moral concern, if this law is affirmed here and elsewhere, it will become ever more difficult to reverse the practice and to expand true compassionate care. We can keep health care in California from going down that path and work for a California that truly cares for its people.

Thank you for your understanding and assistance.

I encourage you to pray this prayer:

O God, source of all life and hope,
look kindly on our brothers and sisters facing the end of their lives,
fill them with the hope of your mercy and give them peace and comfort.

We pray for all Californians,
inspire them to protect the lives of the elderly, the infirm, and the disabled.

Renew our commitment to building a community where every human life is welcomed and wanted, valued and defended—from conception to natural death.

We ask this through the intercession of Saint John Paul II.
Amen.

Fr. Mike



What the Catholic Church Teaches About the End of Life

Medical advances can help save lives. They also can present terminally-ill patients and their loved ones with difficult choices at the end of life.

Catholic teaching gives patients and their families' principles for making decisions about initiating or continuing medical treatments.

"But normally one is held to use only ordinary means...according to the circumstances of persons, places, times, and culture – that is to say, means that do not involve any grave burden for oneself or another."
(Pope Pius XII)

Ordinary and Extraordinary

Treatments that offer reasonable hope of benefit that may be obtained without excessive pain, expense or burden are considered ordinary means. Treatments that do not offer reasonable hope of benefit and cannot be obtained without excessive pain, expense or burden are considered extraordinary means.

Respecting the sacredness of life, each person decides the benefits and burdens of treatment according to their own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health at the time of the decision.

When confronted with highly emotional life-and-death decisions, Catholics should gather all the facts, consult with their physician and family, reflect on Catholic teaching, and pray.

"We are called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of our earthly existence"...because it consists in sharing the very life of God." (Pope John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*)



Q. Does the Church require Catholics to pursue all efforts to preserve life?

A. *No. Human life is a gift from God and we have a duty to preserve it. But we enter into eternal life through death, and the Church teaches that treatments or procedures may be refused if they offer little or no benefit and cause undue burden.*

Catholic Teaching on Assisted Suicide

Because all life is sacred, Catholic teaching holds that assisted suicide can never be permitted.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide stand in contradiction to the Catholic understanding that all life bears God's image and has inherent dignity.

Allowing to Die vs. Killing - Killing is an intentional act that causes death, while allowing to die is withholding or withdrawing futile or burdensome treatments.

Making Good Decisions at the End of Life

"Dying is one of the most important moments in our lives. Like all important moments, it deserves thoughtful preparation." (Father Lawrence Reilly, Ethicist and Theologian)

Q. What's the difference between withholding treatment and assisted suicide?

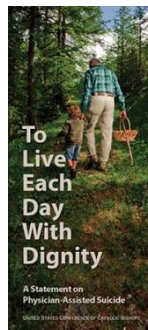
A. Assisted suicide is the intentional taking of life and is never permissible. Withholding "extraordinary means" of medical treatment is morally permissible, allowing nature to take its course and death to occur naturally.

The Church encourages all Catholics to prayerfully reflect on death and to prepare for it responsibly. This may include preparing a living will and durable power of attorney for health care to make their wishes known.

All Catholics are strongly encouraged to make their desires known to their family, friends and doctor regarding initiating or continuing life-sustaining procedures in the event of a terminal condition. Catholics also are encouraged to give power of attorney for health care to someone they trust who can make health care decisions for them, if they are unable to do so for themselves.

Resources

Available from www.usccb.org:



To live in a manner worthy of our human dignity, and to spend our final days on this earth in peace and comfort, surrounded by loved ones—that is the hope of each of us. In particular, Christian hope sees these final days as a time to prepare for our eternal destiny.

Visit the California Catholic Conference, www.cacatholic.org, or email leginfo@cacatholic.org, for more information.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be."

John 14:3