

## **Teachings Catholics should know about End of Life Issues and Care for the Dying**

### **A) Human Life Is Always A Good**

The dignity of human life flows from creation in the image and likeness of God, Genesis 1:26, from redemption by Jesus the Christ, and from our common destiny to share a life with God beyond all corruption. None of these sources of our dignity takes into account our intellectual or physical capacity or age of life expectancy. While our abilities to reason, discern between good and evil, and exercise free will can allow us to know and love God, they must be understood in light of our ultimate destiny. For God created humanity for incorruption and made people in the image of God's own eternity. From the first moment of existence, all human beings are eternal beings. Thus, the Roman Catholic vision of the dying person rejects any and all "quality of life" calculus of human dignity based on the decline of our earthly functions.

### **B) We Respect The Good Of A Person's Life By Not Killing And Offering Care**

The Fifth Commandment tells us "You shall not kill". We have in addition the entire law of the Gospel that calls us to revere life, to love it and to foster it through the gift of self. In light of this broader command to care for life it is necessary that all who approach the critically ill and dying show by their own conduct that they take the words of the Gospels seriously. Therefore care and concern for people close to death is one of the most important signs of ecclesial credibility. Those who in the last phase of life feel supported by sincere Catholic Christians can more easily trust that Christ truly awaits them in the new life after death. Moreover, the sick person who feels surrounded by a loving human and Catholic Christian presence does not give way to depression and anguish as would be the case if one were left to suffer and die alone and wanting to be done with life.

### **C) The Underlying Evil At Issue In The Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia Debate Is The Belief That Human Life Is No Longer A Good**

The free choice to take one's own or another's life, or to neglect it, is characterized by a mentality ever less ready to recognize life as a value in itself, relative to God alone, a concept of the quality of life in terms of efficiency and psycho-physical satisfaction, incapable of seeing any meaning in suffering and handicap, and hence to be avoided at any physical cost and by every means, and a vision of death as a liberation from existence already considered meaningless. Accordingly, a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. One may choose to destroy life through a lethal act, such as by shooting a gun or by administering an overdose of drugs. Or one might choose to neglect life by failing to accept or provide necessary care, thus permitting death to occur when care would have prevented it.

### **D) Persons Who Commit Suicide Are Not Excluded From The Possibility Of Eternal Salvation**

While suicide itself is always morally objectionable, a person driven to suicide because of depression or out of desperation is not acting freely. The catholic Church abhors suicide, while it cherishes the suicidal person and trusts in God's providence. We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to God alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives. In any case, all suicidal expressions should be disregarded as pleas for life affirming help, not death.

### **E) We Are Not Required To Sustain Life By Avoiding Death At All Costs, Since Life Is Not An Absolute Good**

Usually of greatest concern to a believer is whether a particular choice to withhold or withdraw life-prolonging treatments constitutes neglect if death follows. Must one always avoid death? No! As long as one is not seeking death or rejecting life when refusing care, then the answer is no. One does not have to be hooked up to every machine under the sun. Rejecting treatment because it is too burdensome, risky, ineffective, or disproportionate to the expected outcome is not neglect. One's duty to care in such circumstances shifts from avoiding death to providing comfort and care as death approaches.

**F) Hospice & Good Pain Management Respects The Lives of Dying Persons & Should Be Encouraged**

Going on hospice is NOT giving up on life. Life can be lived fully to the end because the hospice environment frees one from the threat of pain, loneliness, and despair. Giving medication to aid in ending pain and suffering is not the same as giving medication to end a life.