



*"... I have set before you life and death,
blessings and curses. Choose life so that
you and your descendants may live,
loving the Lord your God, obeying him
and holding fast to him; for that
means life to you and length of days..."*

(Deut. 30:19)

Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
June 5th, 2016

To the faithful of the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth,

Dear Friends,

Greetings and blessings to all of you!

Today, we stand on the threshold of a major cultural shift in our country. We do not know if tomorrow the Government of Canada will have enacted legislation confirming the practice of medically assisted suicide. Whatever the decision on this matter will be, the fact that such a practice can be imagined and legalized is a reflection of how much Canadian society has moved away from values which were commonly upheld, respected and rooted in the Christian foundations of Canada. These values are no longer supported culturally or legally. Respect for life from conception to natural death is no longer to be presumed or expected, nor is it protected by law.

It is important, therefore, that those of us who believe that life is sacred and a gift from God be encouraged to remain strong in our convictions; that we uphold our Christian faith and confirm our resolve to uphold life. In our daily confrontation with the challenges of our culture, it is always tempting to find ourselves drawn in by the allure of popular thinking and fall easily into the trap of following the crowd. Medically assisted death in our country has become widely supported and seen as an acceptable and efficient medical intervention for dealing with both suffering and death which can be called "medicalization of suffering and death". However, suffering and death are not medical problems. They are part of life and human reality.

Medically assisted death is unacceptable. It is wrong and immoral by many standards including our Catholic teaching. In this matter we are now a minority among Canada's citizens. In the life of our Church, this is not a new experience. Christians in the past have been in situations where they have had to stand up courageously and at great cost for what was held to be true. We are once again in such a context with regards to the defense of life, the mystery of suffering, the protection of the vulnerable and with regards to the freedom of conscience.

When we gather for the sacrifice of the Mass, we remind ourselves regularly that the mystery of our faith has to do with facing and overcoming death. This comes from Christ's resurrection and the conviction that life does not end with death, it is changed and transformed. Faith in the Resurrection is what allows us to face with hope, even the inevitable sufferings associated with the end of our earthly life. This is the hope when upheld by a community of faith and the accompaniment of our brothers and sisters, which makes

possible facing even the last temptation (the possibility of suicide) without falling into despair or feeling abandoned. This community's assistance is crucially important because it counters the main reasons for requesting medically assisted death. Some of these reasons include intractable pain, but even more so and primarily, it is out of fear for the loss of dignity, guilt at being a burden, uncertainty regarding care needs and feeling of loss of control that medically assisted suicide is requested. These are real issues of human suffering for which medicine has no prescription. However, where a community committed to the care of suffering persons exists, it can diminish the fears and anxieties associated with end of life, and such a community can also protect a person's right to live with dignity and die a good death.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide have been unacceptable by long-standing human understanding of life and death; wrong by traditional standards of morality, medical ethics and diverse religious perspectives. Now that medical assistance in dying will become an acceptable practice in our secular and pragmatic society, as Catholics we must learn to live our faith in this present unwelcoming culture which promotes death rather than respect for life. For us to choose life, as the word of God calls us to do, it will be necessary for our Church to develop a merciful and caring pastoral practice for all our fellow human beings but with particular attention to our sick and elderly, our vulnerable and poor. In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has challenged us to become evangelizing communities by showing mercy; by becoming more deeply involved in the lives of people; by facing life's human struggles in the way we care and support each other, and by embracing each other's sufferings.

For all these reasons, I exhort you to be well informed about what is at stake in the legalization of medically assisted suicide; to be very careful and attentive in your choice of health care providers; to insist on respect for your Christian values and to dialogue seriously with members of your community and family about your wishes, in end of life circumstances.

As Catholics we are Christian disciples committed to follow the way of the Lord whose response to suffering was to provide care! As Christ healed the sick and broken-hearted with his acts of compassion, our present Christian response to suffering must be in keeping with Christ's actions by transforming suffering with meaning. When there is no meaning to suffering, that is when it is only pain, and of course people become afraid, angry and depressed. But where there is meaning, because there is love and proper care, in a community of support, suffering can become sacrifice! Sacrifice, in our Christian perspective, is not just another word for 'put up with'. It literally means, from its Latin root, to make something 'sacred'.

This is why I call upon every priest, deacon, religious and lay pastoral minister to work with the faithful at establishing a parish based pastoral ministry of care and compassion for all those in need in our communities . In this way, suffering can become transformed into something significant and sacred by sharing our faith and trust in God's love by the concrete hands-on manner that we look after our brothers and sisters. In this spirit, let us demand adequate palliative care services from our healthcare institutions. Where this is not possible, can we find in our communities, ministers of compassion to assist and accompany the dying in our tradition of a good death? As we work on this, let us entrust our effort to Mary, who stood by her dying son, who is the Mother of the Church and ask her to continue to pray for us, "*...now and at the hour of our death.*" Amen.



†Anthony Mancini
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth