

Catholic Response to assisted suicide – points of education & discussion

- **Easy access to our *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)***
<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>
- Archbishop Fulton Sheen was an incredible ‘preacher-teacher’ from 1930-1950. He said there were probably not more than 100 people in the United States that disagreed with what the Catholic Church teaches...but there are thousands, maybe even millions who disagree with what they ***THINK*** the Catholic Church teaches! But if they were to truly understand Her teachings, they would find that they ring true in the deepest parts of their heart.
- Catholic teachings do NOT call for ‘life at ***all costs***’, but rather recognizes that dying is a natural process that must happen. The Church teaches that ***pain management*** is critical to the process & MORE pain control can be sought EVEN IF it happens to ‘hasten death’ PROVIDED the ***INTENTION*** was to ***EASE PAIN & NOT to hasten death***. This is a very subtle difference. But it is a critical difference that many do not seem to understand. Indeed, if this was understood & the medical profession was able to implement this with the appropriate checks & balances, good people would probably NOT be seeking assisted suicide.
- But it is critical to understand this subtle difference. Just as in Real Estate you have the mantra: “Location, Location, Location”? Here we should consider the mantra: “INTENTION, INTENTION, INTENTION”. Meaning, the INTENT of seeking more pain control is to ease the pain of the patient. It is NOT to bring about the death of the patient, even though that MAY be the inevitable outcome.
- this is seemingly one of the ‘best kept secrets’ of our faith teachings ...this hits people WHERE THEY LIVE!...& as they suffer with death...something all of us will do in some form or other...our own or one or more loved ones.
- this concept is demonstrated in the ***‘Principle of Double Effect’***
<http://www.stmparish.com/20b.%20C15,%2016%20-%20Principle%20of%20Double%20Effect.pdf>
(source: New Catholic Encyclopedia)
 - Specifically, it is a ‘*rule of conduct frequently used in moral theology to determine when a person may lawfully perform an action from which two effects will follow, one bad effect & the other a good effect.*’
 - the graphic uses the very dramatic example of a pregnant woman with a nonviable fetus in a cancerous womb. The question becomes do you operate (hysterectomy) which would have the good effect of saving the mother but would have the bad effect of the death of the baby?
 - The ‘action’ of the operation is morally good (or neutral)
 - The desired object (or intention) is for the good effect (mom survives) & NOT for the bad effect (death of baby)
 - The good effect (mom’s survival) follows directly from the action of the operation & NOT from the bad effect (ie: not from seeking the death of the baby)
 - The good effect (mom’s survival) outweighs the bad effect (death of baby especially given the baby AND mom would not survive without the operation).
- So, applying this principle to a patient in palliative care:
 - The action of giving more pain control is morally good
 - The desired object (or intention) is for the good effect (patient’s pain relieved/reduced) & NOT the bad effect (ie: not seeking death of patient)
 - The good effect (patient’s pain relieved/reduced) follows directly from the action of more pain control & NOT from the bad effect (ie: not from seeking death of the patient)
 - The good effect (patient’s pain relieved/reduced) outweighs the bad effect (ie: potential & unintended death of patient).

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** puts it more eloquently:

- **CCC 2278** Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. **Here one *does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted.*** The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.
- **CCC 2279** Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of **painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, *even at the risk of shortening their days,*** can be morally ***in conformity with human dignity*** if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only ***foreseen and tolerated as inevitable.*** Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.

Euthanasia or 'assisted-suicide' – misguided 'compassion':

- As Catholics we need to care for the sick - to BE with them, pray with & for them, feed, clean, cry & laugh with them, SUFFER WITH THEM. Show them the face of Christ!
- Catholics need to **understand** & be able to communicate with respect & charity the concept of **SUFFERING as a PRAYER** – ***our suffering as a means of adding to the work of Christ Himself.*** In Col 1:24; Paul says to the Colossians: ***"And now I am happy about my sufferings for you, for *by means of my physical sufferings I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of His body, the Church.*"*** (see also Redemptive Suffering excerpts from the Catechism below)

Suffering as prayer:

- may seem 'counter-cultural' but we only need look at the crucifix to see the suffering Christ – who CHOSE to die this way.
- take comfort in the fact that Jesus too wished that the cup of suffering could be taken from Him...but then submitted to the Will of God the Father.
- we have a moral obligation to euthanize our *pets & animals* as ***they cannot choose to offer their suffering as prayer or to 'nail their suffering to the cross of Christ'***
- But we humans – ***made in the likeness & DIGNITY of God*** – we DO have the choice of offering our sufferings as prayer for ourselves or others.
- **this is NOT to say that suffering should be left unchecked!** Indeed, there is MUCH progress in medicine & in Palliative care practices that can bring comfort to those in need. These are things we need to push for more of...but this can be very expensive! We need to let our Parliamentarians know that as Canadian tax-payers, ***THAT*** is what we are ***WILLING*** to pay for! NOT assisted suicide! (again, see Redemptive Suffering excerpts from the Catechism below)

Lifesitenews Petition to stop assisted suicide in Canada: ([stop assisted suicide in Canada https://www.lifesitenews.com/petitions/stop-assisted-suicide-in-canada](https://www.lifesitenews.com/petitions/stop-assisted-suicide-in-canada))

*"Canada's Supreme Court has just overturned the country's ban on assisted suicide, meaning that doctors will now be allowed to **actively participate in bringing about the deaths of their patients.***

If the colleges of physicians in places like Ontario and Saskatchewan have their way, doctors could very well be forced to end their patients' lives.

*This shocking ruling goes **against the clear will of Parliament,** which overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to legalize euthanasia in **2010 by a vote of 226 to 59.***

*The Supreme Court has given Parliament a year to enact a new law. But Parliament has the power to act **right now** - by invoking the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms' little-used **"notwithstanding clause," which allows Parliament to override a court ruling.***

We need to urge Parliament to invoke the "notwithstanding clause" and craft a law that will protect vulnerable Canadians from this heinous ruling."

Relevant Excerpts from Catechism of the Catholic Church:

CCC 2258: **The 5th Commandment: You shall not kill:**

CCC 2258 – 2283: Respect for Human Life: This section of the Catechism deals with topics such as Legitimate defense, Intentional homicide, Abortion, Euthanasia & Suicide. I've spelled out in full the section on Euthanasia:

CCC 2276-2279: **Euthanasia (so called 'mercy-killing')**

- **2276** Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.
- **2277** Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.
- Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.
- **2278** Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.
- **2279** Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.

Redemptive Suffering: when I searched the Catechism using the expression "redemptive suffering" I was directed to numerous paragraphs including: 440, 601, 1521 & those below which I chose to spell out in full below:

CCC 618: Our participation in Christ's sacrifice:

The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men". (1 Tim 2:5)
But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men.

He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]", (Mt 16:24)
for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps." (1 Pet 2:21)

In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. (Mk 10:39; Jn 21:18; Col 1:24)

This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering. (Lk 2:35)

Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven. (Rose of Lima, 1668)

CCC 1500: Illness in human life

1500 Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

1501 Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential

so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

CCC 1502: The sick person before God

1502 The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing.^{Pss 6:3; 38; Isa 38}

Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the healing.^{Mk 2:5-12 & numerous psalms} It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer."^{Ex 15:26}

The prophet intuits that **suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others.**^{Isa 53:11}

Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness.^{Isa 33:24}

CCC 1503: Christ the physician

1503 **Christ's compassion toward the sick** and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people"^{Ex 15:26}

and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins;^{Mk 2:5-12} **he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of.**^{Mk 2:17}

His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me."^{Mt 25:36}

His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special **attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul.** It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.

1504 Often Jesus asks the sick to believe.^{Mk 5:34, 36; 9:23}

He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands,^{Mk 7:32-36; 8:22-25} mud and washing.^{Jn 9:6-7}

The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all."^{Lk 6:19; Mk 1:41; 3:10; 6:56} And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us.

1505 Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."^{Mt 8:17; Isa 53:4}

But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world,"^{Jn 1:29; Isa 53:4-6}

of which illness is only a consequence. **By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.**

CCC 1506: "Heal the sick . . ."

1506 **Christ invites his disciples to follow him by taking up their cross in their turn.**^{Mt 10:38}

By following him they acquire a **new outlook on illness and the sick.** Jesus associates them with his own life of poverty and service. He makes them share in his ministry of compassion and healing: "So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them."^{Mk 6:12-13}

1507 The risen Lord renews this mission ("In my name . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."^{Mk 16:17-18})

and confirms it through the signs that the Church performs by invoking his name.^{Acts 9:34; 14:3}

These signs demonstrate in a special way that Jesus is truly "God who saves."^{Mt 1:21; Acts 4:12}

1508 The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing^{1 Cor 12:9,28,30}

so as to make manifest the power of the grace of the risen Lord. But even the most intense prayers do not always obtain the healing of all illnesses. Thus St. Paul must learn from the Lord that **"my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,"** and that the **sufferings to be endured can mean that "in my flesh I complete what is lacking in**

Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church."^{2 Cor 12:9; Col 1:24}

1509 "Heal the sick!"^{Mt 10:8}

The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out by **taking care of the sick** as well as by **accompanying them with her prayer of intercession.** She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that

gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health. (Jn 6:54, 58; 1 Cor 11:30)