



A Pastoral Exhortation on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (to be read at Lord's Day Masses on March 5–6, 2016)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada redefined medical ethics by striking down Canada's Criminal Code prohibition of assisted suicide. This decision causes concern because authorities could interpret the subjective language of the Court decision to allow euthanasia, with few or no constraints. The result? Society would abandon people at their most vulnerable stage, rather than provide proper medical care for their suffering and need. This is precisely how the Parliamentary Committee, which recently published its recommendations on February 25, viewed the Supreme Court decision.

From not only a Catholic perspective but any rational perspective, the intentional, willful act of killing oneself or another human being is clearly morally wrong. How can a just society permit the state-sanctioned taking of lives by our physicians? When any life is vulnerable and can be taken at will, the dignity of all lives is seriously eroded. Respect for all human life in our society is jeopardized.

Advocates for assisted suicide and euthanasia often raise the issue of managing severe, chronic pain. They propose terminating the patient's life as the best "medical treatment." Many people do indeed fear physical pain, but the Church teaches that patients in the final phase of terminal illness may receive whatever pain relief is required, even if, indirectly, it could shorten their life. The principle involved here is simple and clear: the goal of the medication is to ease the patient's great pain, not to hasten their death.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly teaches us, "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" (n. 2277). The right to life is not a matter for Christians only. It is a human right for all. To formally cooperate in the killing of the disabled, frail, sick, or suffering, even if motivated by a misplaced compassion, requires a prior judgement that such lives do not have value and are not worth living.

But all human life has value. The law should protect all life. No one forfeits the right to life because of illness or disability.

The Catholic Church does not advocate prolonging life at any cost. Rather, the Church is guided by the principle of the quality of life that considers the *whole person* and not simply keeping the body going no matter what. As rational Catholic Christians, we ask the question in evaluating whether or not to accept life-prolonging treatment: is there a reasonable hope of benefit without excessive pain, expense, or other serious problem?

As your bishop and your brother in Christ, I exhort you to fast and pray that our parliamentarians heed our concerns. Please take part in a Novena to St. Joseph from March 10–18. Let us pray that our legislators at the national and provincial levels will protect life, especially that of the most vulnerable, and that they will respect the right of medical professionals to refuse to take part in assisted-dying.

What else can you do? Take these concerns to your Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament. You may also join or start a parish pro-life group to support the work of resisting the culture of death and nurturing the culture of life in Canada. Talk to your friends and co-workers about the grave threat to human dignity and life that assisted suicide and euthanasia pose to our most vulnerable neighbours. Explain to your children, grandchildren, friends, and associates the importance of reverencing human life that begins at conception in the womb and ends in natural death.

I encourage you to be an agent of mercy in this Jubilee Year of Mercy—“feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, [comfort] the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.” Catholics, like all other citizens, have a right and a duty to participate in the political process of our democracy. We must act to uphold the dignity of every human life.

Take courage. Do not be afraid to stand up for the value and dignity of life. Catholic Christians have a special role to play in resisting this culture of death. I call on all Catholics to be strong supporters and proponents of the Gospel of Life. Make your voice heard.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Terrence Prendergast, S.J.", with a small cross symbol to the left.

✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa