

## RESPECT LIFE ISSUES II: LIVING EACH DAY WITH DIGNITY

In the midst of the most bizarre presidential election campaign of my lifetime, not to mention the threats and troubles in our world, a nonagenarian whom I admire recently shared with me— “It is a good time to be old!” His sentiment may not be dismissed as merely the words of someone who no longer relates to the hair lengths or clothing styles of today’s youth. Typically one generation cannot understand another in this regard. No, it goes to the heart of what is increasingly obvious— we are a divided nation in so many, many ways. Having said that, today I wish to address an important end-of-life issue, namely the many assisted suicide laws that have sprung up. This is an entirely different question from whether or when someone ought to be taken off life support. The end of life ought to be a time of serenity, even if the accompanying loss of independence and increased health issues make for much suffering.

**Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI** has been quite open about his weakening physical condition. “He’s like a candle which is slowly, serenely fading. He is serene, at peace with God, himself and the world,” said Archbishop Georg Gänswein, Prefect of the Pontifical Household, who lives with the former Pontiff in a former convent in the grounds of the Vatican. In a recent book-length interview entitled his “Last Conversations,” Pope Benedict discussed how his prayer life has changed, even since his resignation, now that he is freed from so many daily obligations: “I can now pray the breviary deeply and slowly,” he said, “and thereby deepen my friendship with the Psalms, with the Fathers” of the Church. At the same time, he too noted the difficulties inherent at this stage of his life, saying: “one feels the difficulties of life’s questions more deeply; one feels the weight of today’s godlessness, the weight of the absence of faith, which goes deep into the church. But then one also feels the greatness of Jesus Christ’s words, which evade interpretation more often than before.”

Both in life and in death we are the Lord’s. It is not for us to determine the end of our own life, any more than we chose its beginning. The state of Oregon has had an **assisted suicide law** effectively since 1997, following several failed legal attempts to stop it. In 2015, there were 132 assisted deaths, a 26% increase over 2014 and almost eight times the deaths in the law’s first full year. In the neighboring state of Washington, the number ingesting lethal drugs in 2015 (166 patients) was more than three times the number in 2010 (51), the first full year of that state’s new law. The USCCB’s **Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities** fact sheet shows what is particularly scary about Oregon’s law; “once lethal drugs have been prescribed the Act has *no* requirements for assessing the patient’s consent, competency, or voluntariness. No witnesses are required at the time of death.”

People claim that these laws exist for those who are terminally ill anyway, so it is merely hastening the process that is clearly foreseen. But the statistics do not support this. In Washington in 2015, 16% (compared to 9% the previous year) died more than 25 weeks after their initial request for the drugs, **living as long as 95 weeks**. We must not underestimate the role played by depression in these extremely difficult situations. Richard Doerflinger, the Pro-Life Secretariat’s Associate Director, recently wrote about the surveys conducted of those who availed themselves of these laws: “When asked why they were obtaining the drug overdose, 96% of patients said they were less able to engage in activities that make life enjoyable; almost as many said they were losing their autonomy or their dignity; about half said they had become a ‘burden’ on family or caregivers.” More than 96% received no psychological evaluation.

Years ago, I read the book published by a group calling itself the **Hemlock Society** (cf. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*) so that I could at least be familiar with their flawed reasoning. That same group has morphed and grown into a new organization called “Compassion and Choices,” a multi-million dollar operation. Just as the pro-abortion lobby assiduously avoids the use of the word *abortion*, so too the assisted suicide lobby has honed in on the word *compassion*. After all, who could possibly be against choice and compassion, right? Our U.S. Bishops have courageously led the way in giving voice to this critical stage of our life, revealing the true dignity of life at every stage. In their 2011 statement entitled, “To Live Each Day with Dignity,” the bishops note: “Effective palliative care also allows patients to devote their attention to the unfinished business of their lives, to **arrive at a sense of peace** with God, with loved ones, and with themselves. No one should dismiss this time as useless or meaningless.”

We are called to live each day with dignity. I have witnessed first hand how the elderly, even those incapable of caring for themselves, exhibit tremendous dignity in their final years. As they gracefully accept help in their weakness, we honor them best by preserving that dignity until the day that the Lord calls them home. I'll never pretend that suffering is easy— often it is a tremendous burden. It can be horrible, in fact. And yet, our sufferings need not be useless, as we offer them up for our families, our nation, the Church and the world. Perhaps I am selfish, but the prayers of the elderly inspire me and lift me up. Far from being a burden, they are both wanted and needed. Please keep praying for the rest of us— we need it!

- I am delighted to announce that Archbishop Hebda will celebrate a special Mass on All Souls Day, November 2 at 5:15 p.m. It will be offered in honor of all Law Enforcement and First Responders. Called the “**Blue Mass,**” it honors their service, recalls those who have died in service, and prays for God’s protection and guidance as they carry out their vital work on behalf of our community. I hope that as many of you as possible will attend to show support.
- As we edge closer to the elections, I invite you to become informed citizens, not just at the top of the ticket, but equally for the “down ballot” races. Visit the Minnesota Catholic Conference website at [www.mncc.org/resources/catholic-social-teaching](http://www.mncc.org/resources/catholic-social-teaching) for valuable assistance in forming your conscience before you vote.
- Pope Francis announced his intention to name **17 new cardinals** (13 eligible to vote in a conclave) at a consistory slated for November 19, the pope’s third, including the first Americans named by him. Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago, Bishop Kevin Farrell, former Bishop of Dallas and new Prefect of the Vatican dicastery for laity, family and life and Archbishop Joseph Tobin of Indianapolis were among the list.
- One of the pope’s “over 80” picks as Cardinal (i.e. ineligible to vote in a conclave) is Fr. Ernest Simoni, an Albanian survivor of political oppression in staunchly communist and atheist Albania. He served 28 years in hard labor because he would not renounce his faith.
- Among the seven people being canonized today at St. Peter’s Basilica is **Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity**, a French Carmelite nun (†1906) who is best known for her prayer “O My God, Trinity Whom I Adore.” I am thoroughly convinced that the contemplative vocation is more vital than ever.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector