**Let There Be Life**

Saint Cletus Respect Life Ministry Newsletter 6, Summer 2023

“**If you want peace, work for justice. If you want justice, defend life. If you want life, embrace truth—the truth revealed by God.” ---Saint Pope John Paul II**

**From the teaching of the Church**

“Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped people should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus, an act of 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 of the living God, the Creator” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2276, 2277).

1. **From the St. Cletus Respect Life Ministry: “On Euthanasia”**

 The word *euthanasia* is from the Greek meaning “good death.” For many a good death meant dying with loved ones present, dying with a sense of peace for a life well-lived, having received the sacraments before dying, or having had time to say goodbyes and tie up the loose ends of life. Naturally, everyone would like to leave this life without a lengthy, difficult, painful time of dying. For many years now, especially in the West, there has been a movement to hasten death by assisting people toward suicide or doctor assisted suicide for reasons of terminal disease, prolonged pain and suffering. This has been expanded in some quarters to include a diminished quality of life, which obviously can have quite an array of definitions, a life that no longer has meaning, a life that is overly burdensome on family or societal resources, or a life that a person simply no longer sees the value in living. The Judeo-Christian ethic, which has shaped Western ethics for two thousand years, held that human life was a sacred gift from God always to be nurtured and protected through the moment of natural death. This did not mean one was morally obligated to resort to extraordinary means to extend the dying process; it did mean one had a moral responsibility not to neglect ordinary means to nurture, care for, and extend earthly life. St. John XXIII explained so well in his great social justice encyclical Peace on Earth, that every human life is sacred; every human life has dignity and is worthy of respect, appreciation, and protection against anything that would end it before its natural completion. The human person has these attributes of sacredness, dignity, and worth, not because of any potential he or she might have, not because of anything already accomplished, and not because of a government’s view of someone’s value or worth, but simply because he or she ***is, and is created by God. This is the Christian ethic regarding the human person.*** To attack or undermine this absolute value at any point in the continuum of life whether at conception, in utero, at birth, in sickness, in old age, because of someone’s perceived diminishment of quality of life, because of criminal behavior, or a societal perception of strained resources, is never morally acceptable.

 On May 13, 2023, Pope Francis spoke about the legalization of euthanasia in Portugal the day before.

 The Pope said, “I am very sad, because in the country where Our Lady appeared (Fatima), a law to kill

 has been enacted. It is one more step in the long list of countries with euthanasia. Portugal’s parliament

 voted to allow medically assisted suicide in some cases. The law says a person should be able to ask for

 doctor assistance for suicide when he or she has intense suffering, with definitive injury or has serious

 and incurable disease. The new law will also permit a doctor to euthanize a patient when ‘medically

 assisted suicide is not possible due to the physical disability of the patient.’ The law will allow giving

 lethal drugs so persons can take their own lives, and the direct killing of patients by their doctors.” As

 Pope Francis noted, other countries have legalized euthanasia in varying degrees. The Netherlands has

 for many years been at the vanguard of the euthanasia movement. “Current Rules in the Scheme for

 Termination of Pregnancy & Termination of Life for Newborns” are being amended to include children

 under 12 who are determined to be incurably ill, suffering hopelessly, or expected to die in the foreseeable

 future. Parents and doctors should communicate with the child in a manner appropriate to their age that

 the termination of his life is the only reasonable way to remove the suffering. The Dutch Health Ministry

 added that if a child cannot consent to his or her own termination due to lack of age or condition, then

 parents can give the approval for the termination of the child’s life. After each child is killed, the Dutch

 Prosecution Service and a review committee will examine the child’s termination to insure it was done

 Humanely and with care. In 2014, Belgium legalized voluntary child euthanasia without age restrictions

 so long as the child asked for euthanasia, understood it, and had parental approval with a doctor’s

 agreement that the child will likely die in the not-to-distant future anyway. Physician assisted suicide is

 already legal in the U.S. in nine states and the District of Columbia.

**IV. What do other world religions say about Euthanasia?**

* Buddhism does not support euthanasia because all life has precious value and human life is the most valuable and should never be undermined or destroyed.
* Hinduism believes that human life is inherently valuable. Most Hindus agree that doctors should not help a person to end his or her life. This will separate the soul and body at an unnatural time. It will harm the karma (getting one’s life into a good state before death) of both patient and doctor. Euthanasia interferes with the soul’s progress toward liberation.
* Islam forbids any form of euthanasia, because Allah (God) is the author and giver of life. Only Allah determines the length of one’s life.
* Judaism: “The message of Judaism is that one must struggle until the last breath of life. Until the last moment, one has to live and rejoice and give thanks to the Creator” (Dr. Rachamim Melamed-Cohen). “Jewish law forbids active euthanasia. There are no exceptions to this rule and it makes no difference if the person concerned wants to die. The value of human life is infinite and beyond measure, so that any part of life—even if only an hour or second—is of precisely the same worth as seventy years of it” (Rabbi Jakobovits, former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom). Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Shlomo Auerbach have ruled that a dying person need not be kept alive by artificial means that will not restore health but only prolong the dying process.

**V. An interesting reflection on euthanasia from an ancient coffin.**

A guide in the Nelson-Atkins Art Museum in Kansas City gave an explanation of pictures and inscriptions on

 a stone coffin from the Far East. They told the story of a family who cared for an aging grandfather at home. At

 some point it was decided that grandpa should be taken up a mountain and be allowed to die there since he was

 old and no longer productive. The old man’s son and grandson placed him on a stretcher and made the journey to

 the mountain. Reaching a nice summit they set the stretcher down, said their goodbyes, and left grandpa with a

 jug of water and some bread. As they made their way back home, the son said, “Father, we must go back; we left

 the stretcher on the mountain.” The father said, “But we don’t need it now.” The son replied, “Oh, we will need it

 someday to carry you up the mountain when you are old and can no longer work. Father paused, “Son, let’s return

 to the mountain and bring grandpa back home where he belongs.”



**Respect Life Ministry meets the third Wednesday of every month at 6:30 pm in the Callahan Room of the Parish Hall.**