

Cherishing Life, Accepting Death



How great a lie ...to make people think that lives affected by grave illness are not worth living! Pope Francis

Kathleen, a much-loved grandmother, collapsed at home one Saturday morning and was rushed to hospital. Early signs pointed towards a stroke. The doctors talked about the next twenty-four hours being critical; it seemed like Kathleen might not even survive. The priest was called and Kathleen received the anointing of the sick. Doctors were talking about brain damage and whether interventions might be possible. Suddenly the family was faced with big questions. What would Kathleen want and how could the Church help guide any decisions? How do we accept death when it comes and cherish life while we can?

There have been remarkable medical and technological advances so that the chronically ill can receive life-saving treatments. We can be truly thankful for such advances. And yet at some time or other we will all die. These same advances have led to decisions about appropriate treatment becoming more complex. At the end of life, there are two thoughts which can help guide us all.

The first is that we love life. Every person is loved by God and every life is a precious gift never to be destroyed or neglected. It is wrong to hasten or bring about death. God will call us in His good time.

The second is that we accept death. This means there is no obligation to pursue medical treatment when it no longer serves its purpose – that is having no effect or indeed harming the patient - or where the risks or burdens of the treatment outweigh the likely benefits.

We need to prepare to face life-threatening crises. Ideally these difficult and important decisions need to be faced with others – our spouse, our siblings, our extended family members. The family, after all, should be the privileged place where mutual support and understanding occurs.

Some times difficult decisions need to be made and the views of family and experts are needed. But in such situations these two questions can guide us: "is this decision loving life?" and "is this decision accepting the inevitability of death?" Depending on the situation we should seek ways to answer yes to both, as life itself is a gift from God, and death but the gateway to new life with Him.

More detailed guidance on some of the possible ethical issues - www.dayforlife.org



Day for Life prayer

O blessed Joseph, who breathed your last in the arms of Jesus and Mary, obtain for me this grace: that I may breathe forth my soul in praise, saying in spirit, if I am unable to do so in words: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give Thee my heart and my soul." Amen.

The text of this leaflet is available in large print: www.dayforlife.org

The proceeds of the Day for Life collection to be held in parishes in England and Wales on Sunday 26 July 2015 assist the work of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre and other life-related activities supported by the Church.

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Day for Life is celebrated yearly by the Catholic Church in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. It is a Day dedicated to raising awareness about the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition. Catholic Trust for England and Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX. A company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales. Company No. 4734592. Registered Charity No. 1097482.