

precisely what He did in his paschal mystery. He accepted the suffering of the Cross himself, he endured it, gave it meaning and triumphed over it. And it is this triumphant spirit, given to us in baptism, which allows us to do the same. This is what gives us hope in the face of so much loneliness, pain and fear. This is what convinces us that Isaiah was right when he said 'He did not create the world in vain. He made it to be lived in'. (Is. 45:18) Life is for living, therefore, and life is also worth living.



Christ offers us the opportunity to take suffering seriously, confront it and then go beyond it

Despair

Some people in the Bible, suffering the pain of loneliness, depression and darkness, were tempted to despair. They asked God to let them die and so end it all. The story of Elijah, for example, has a familiar ring to it. Filled with fear and with a sense of foreboding, Elijah, together with a close friend, fled to the countryside. Exhausted, he even decided that he could no longer cope with the company of his closest friend. He abandoned friendship and then journeyed into the wilderness on his own. We are told that, after a day's journey in the blazing sun, 'sitting under a furze bush

done so. Today we pay tribute to those who continue to struggle and we appeal especially to the young, who have all life's opportunities before them, to 'hold on' and then go on to discover the wonder of life and living.

It is Good to Talk

This is the catch-phrase of mobile phone advertising nowadays and it is also a central truth of our human experience. Yes, it is good to talk and it is important to talk. Men, in particular, seem to be poor when it comes to talking out problems, but we all need to remember that expression is the conqueror of depression.

Those who suffer from deep pain need to talk to someone who can listen. Ireland is blessed with many good listeners and listening agencies, organisations such as Aware, the Samaritans and many others. They know how to listen. Call them.

Life after Suicide

During the dark days after the death by suicide of a loved one, friends, neighbours, relatives and local communities reach out to the bereaved family in sympathy and understanding. Each wishes to echo words of comfort and hope to hearts that are broken, feel isolated, are vulnerable and confused. They all unite to say 'There is life after death' – eternal life in God's love for the one who has

he wished he were dead. "Yahweh" he said, "I have had enough. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors.'" Filled with darkness and worn out by the heat and the journey, he lay down, hoping and praying that God would take his life and end his suffering. However, we are told that instead God sent an angel to help him. He gave him bread to eat and water to drink. 'Strengthened by that food he walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God'. (1 Kings 19:1-8)

This pattern has been repeated in the lives of many ordinary people, some of whom have become canonised saints. St Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, who is often seen as having a very simple, straightforward faith, faced great difficulties and suffered excruciating temptations at the end of her life. She spoke of feeling separated from God's grace by 'a great wall which reaches up to the sky and blots out the stars'. In the darkness, a voice seemed to mock her: 'You really believe, do you, that the mist which hangs about you will clear later on? All right, all right, go on longing for death. But death will make nonsense of your hopes; it will mean a night darker than ever, the night of mere non-existence.' Through that ordeal she continued to trust in God. 'The only thing I want badly now is to go on loving till I die of love.' (St Thérèse, *The Autobiography of a Saint*, trans R.Knox, Fontana 1958, pp 201f.)

died by his or her own hand and ordinary life, even if the circumstances have changed radically, for the bereaved.

Each wishes to echo words of comfort and hope to hearts that are broken, feel isolated, are vulnerable and confused.

As the enormity of what has happened sinks in, the bereaved go through the predictable reactions of denial, an awakening sense of loss, anger, personal recrimination and deep pain. The question uppermost in their mind is why. Why did he/she do it? Why did I not notice something strange in their behaviour and prevent it? Why did he/she do this to me? And the list is limitless. And there is no answer to the why. Who knows why it happened? How could you have really noticed? In a recent radio interview the survivor of an attempted suicide explained clearly and with great honesty his thoughts at that time. He had drifted into the outer reaches of loneliness and darkness. So much so that when he was closest to taking his own life, like Elijah, he could not even cope with what he knew to be the genuine concern and understanding of his parents, family and friends. Because of this he disguised his pain and put on a normal, positive attitude to life when he met those he loved. His reflection may help to explain why

Nowadays many people are greatly burdened by personal or family problems, by regret, by illness and by the fear of painful death. They are often tempted to give up. Alone, at first, they try to cope with their pain. Then they attempt to leave it behind and then, like Elijah, some plead with God to end it all because they can cope no longer. Some even feel that God does not care about them. However we believe that once they put their trust in God, in one form or other, God sends them support and they get the strength they needed to carry on. After his ordeal, the sun was still hot for Elijah, the road long and the difficulties which faced him at the beginning were still there. But, with God's help, he overcame the temptation to despair and struggled on.

Life today promises easy and instant solutions to almost everything. Advertising assures us that we can fly away to an idyllic holiday in the sun; that we can live in a luxurious and exclusive home, drive a dream car in attractive company and have all that we could ever desire. We know that even in an Ireland which has been blessed with exceptional economic success in recent years, if this is true in part it is not the whole picture. There are no easy or instant solutions to many of life's problems or tensions. Very often we find ourselves clinging to the wreckage of life when all that is left within us is the will which says 'hold on'. Many wonderful people have not been able to hold on but, equally, many great people have

so many people who have been touched by the suicide will tell you that there was no apparent reason for concern in the behaviour of the one who died. It is true that those who have died would want us to know that they did not take their own lives because of a lack of love for us. At the same time, we all need to recognise that death through suicide causes terrible pain to families and friends and no one deserves this cross.

Our Christian faith assures us that there is life after death and that a merciful and loving God can see beyond our limited human condition. While we believe that 'God is the giver of life, and he alone has the right to decide when that life should end' we also realise that God can look deep within the human heart, recognise its difficulties, understand and forgive. We should always pray for these who take their own lives, try to understand them and commend them to God's mercy.

Life is for Living

Life is for living. We have God's word for this. The Prophet Isaiah assures us that in creating the world 'God made it to be lived in. He did not create it in vain.' (Is. 45:18) Yes, God wants each one of us to live life to the full in this world of ours, to discover its beauty, to respect its nature and to enjoy its blessings. In particular, he wants us to appreciate its wonder and to explore its potential. Through

Our faith also assures us that if we turn to God in our loneliness and pain then we can discover that our darkness is not something created by God. It is a reality from which God wants to rescue us and through which we can triumph. This is central to the message of Christ. He offers us the opportunity to take suffering seriously, confront it and then go beyond it. This is



No matter how great the suffering, for most, the darkness passes eventually.

We recognise that all generations and many individuals have wrestled with darkness, both within themselves and within society. At times dark shadows cross the lives of many of us and for some it seems as if the clouds create a land of shadow in which they are condemned to live forever. And yet the fact remains that for most people the darkness passes eventually.

Darkness



life is God's gift to us, and God wants each one of us to live life to the full

his gift of life to us, God invites all of us to the adventure of discovering him in faith.

God did not create any of us for our own destruction. He gave each one of us the gift of life and made the world for the enjoyment of all the generations that have lived and will live. He wants us to enjoy it. He wants each one of us to discover the joy of living in this world which he has created and, furthermore, he wants each of us to create conditions in the world where every human being can live in dignity and enjoy God's creation. For, as the Catechism tells us: 'we are stewards, not owners of the life God has entrusted to us.' Ours is the task to appreciate life as God's gift and then help others to do so by improving the conditions in which all God's children live.

Finally, we call on everyone, individuals, families, schools, colleges, communities, the Government, the media and health care systems to join in a common effort to make the causes of suicide more fully understood, the care of those at risk more urgent and the families of those bereaved by suicide consoled and supported so that everyone in our country will feel cherished and cared for, especially in these tragic circumstances. In particular, we encourage and support the development of suicide prevention strategies and we commend the efforts of all those who dedicate their energies to this challenging work.

Until relatively recently suicide was uncommon in Ireland and it is still uncommon in many parts of the world. In the past many factors in our culture were responsible for this. In recent years, however, much of what supported people and prevented them from considering suicide seems to have vanished. With economic success has come a weakening of faith and with this the loss of the sense of life as God's gift. With the laudable desire to remove the stigma which surrounded suicide from the families of those who have died has come the erosion of the recognition that suicide is an unthinkable option. While no one should wish to return to the old condemnatory attitudes or attempt to restore the stigma the fact remains that all of us need to recognise that suicide has become a terrifying reality in our society, one which we need to acknowledge and confront. In particular we need to recognise the danger of becoming resigned to the idea that we can do little to prevent suicide in our society today. On this Day for Life 2004, therefore, we would like to explore with you the belief that life is God's gift to us, that He alone can decide when it should end and that God wants each one of us to live life to the full in this world of ours, to discover its beauty, to respect its nature and to enjoy its blessings.

with God's help, begin to understand what has happened and find peace.

It is good to talk. Yes, it is good to talk and it is important to talk. Men, in particular, seem to be poor when it comes to talking out problems but we all need to remember that expression is the conqueror of depression.



VERITAS



www.veritas.ie

In recent times more and more concerned people are asking the questions 'Why?' and 'What can we do about this?' We, the Irish Bishops, would like to address this issue within the context of God's gift of life to our world. During the Day for Life 2004 we want to explore this and share with you our concerns and our support, in the hope that those who may think of suicide would reconsider their situation and those who have been bereaved through self-inflicted deaths may, eventually,



suicide is the second highest cause of non-disease deaths for young people in Europe

A cloud has gathered over Ireland in recent years. Beneath it many lives have ended in tragic circumstances and others have been darkened by the heartbreaking reality of the death of a loved one through suicide. The lives of many young people, in particular, have been overshadowed by this cloud. A recent survey by the World Health Organisation shows that, after road accidents, suicide is the second highest cause of non-disease deaths for young people in Europe. Recent reports and publications have also underlined the extent of this issue in Ireland. In particular, it is notable that the ratio of young males to females who commit suicide is approximately four to one.

Life is for Living

A Reflection on Suicide

Pastoral Letter from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

DAY FOR LIFE
3 OCTOBER 2004