

FRAGILITY AND VALUE OF LIFE

For a few decades now, we have been preoccupied by questions concerning the accompaniment of people who are gravely ill and who are dying. Palliative care was developed to respond to suffering and pain without having recourse to overtreatment. The Members of our National Assembly are soon going to vote on Bill 52, "An Act respecting end-of-life care," which would render euthanasia possible, referring to it as "medical assistance to die". In hastening a person's death, however, we are not helping them in dying, we are directly ending their life. It is therefore important that I impart to you some of my thoughts on the unconditional choice of respecting life, regardless of a person's vulnerable condition, inviting you to always view inseparably fragility and value of life, compassion, and hope.

"Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures" (*Job 3:20-21*)? Through this prayer, Job expressed that his anguish was so severe that he no longer wanted to live. Yet he put his trust in God, in whose "hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being" (*Job 12:10*), by saying with confidence and hope: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (*Job 42:2*).

Like Job, we are constantly experiencing life's fragility and its value at the same time. When illness and dying are involved, the suffering can be so great that we can lose sight of the fact that not only is life a good, but it is always a good. Whatever the infirmity, the fragility, or the pain, *life is always a good*. The challenge is to always view inseparably the fragility of life, which calls us to compassion, and the value of life, which calls us to hope.

We are called to witness to life's goodness, irrespective of the distress we can be faced with when a person is gravely ill or dying. We are called to witness to our kindness towards the sick and dying by accompanying them wholeheartedly, regardless of how little we know about the illness's development or its duration, and regardless of the person's state of consciousness.

We are called to *choose life unconditionally*. Human dignity is not based on one's health condition; it relies solely on the fact of being human, and belongs to each and every individual. Human dignity relies on everyone having the right to life, regardless of the tragedy that a person might be stricken with. Human dignity involves respecting the life

of every individual, for to eliminate a person's life, as fragile and frail as it may be, is to eliminate that person's rights. Even without referring to God, it is important to unwaveringly maintain a respect for life's value so that life in society may remain free and secure. It is important that each of us knows that our family and our society will not hasten our death, but will remain at our side up to the end.

Contemplating God opens our heart to defending life and gives us the strength to go through life loving boundlessly, for God is life: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (*Jn* 1:1-4). Life, before it is ours, in the form of human life, belongs to God, as eternal life. God brought us into existence by creating us in His image and by calling us to participate in His life.

Through Jesus, the Son of God made Man, eternal life entered into time; *eternal life* became accessible to each and every one of us. We receive eternal life *now* through prayer and the sacraments, and it will be fulfilled in the eternal Kingdom. Because Jesus Christ came to us in this life, eternal life has an "already but not yet" quality; it has already begun but is not yet fulfilled. Through Jesus, life was revealed to us: "This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us" (*1 Jn* 1:2). Human life is meant for encountering God's gift.

Jesus, who *is* divine life and who is the reason for our participation in divine life, partakes in our humanity; he exposes himself to fragility, suffering, and death. He embraced our fragility; he did not run from it. He embraced our injured humanity. He embraced the cross. He endured the anguish of suffering as far as to say, "I am deeply grieved, even to death" (*Mt* 26:38), as far as to sweat blood and water while praying in Gethsemane (cf. *Lk* 22:44). Jesus did not allow suffering, anguish, and death to destroy life's beauty and value. He continued to live, pray, and love up to the end. He died praying with love in his heart.

Jesus reaches out to all those who are experiencing more than they can handle, who are under the impression that life no longer has any meaning, and who no longer want to live. There no situation of despair where Jesus is not present. By dying with love on the cross,

he bore all of our sins, all of our suffering, all of our anguish, and all of our deaths. He is present to the lives and the pain of everyone who is dying. When we are stricken with pain and the prospect of death, we can go to Jesus Christ, regardless of the life we have lived, for He is present to everyone, without exception.

In order to witness to life's goodness, beauty, and value, irrespective of the fragility we may be experiencing, we are called to be witnesses to eternal life in Jesus Christ, witnesses to He who lives, witnesses to Christ who died and rose again. That which is most beautiful on earth is the image of Jesus as he shines with Divine Love while crucified and disfigured. That which is most beautiful on earth is love that gives of oneself through fragility, love that endures to the end. By the grace of the Risen Christ, love has the power to transform suffering and to overcome it by leading to hope.

Yes, tragedy is a part of life, but so is love. Yes, we are weighed down by hardships, but we are also blessed with the love and strength we get from our relationships, with the strength that God's presence gives us, the strength that we get from our families and friends, and from the people that provide us with care. By accompanying someone who is seriously ill, or someone who is close to death, we are making room for love, for relationships, and for reconciliation, for Jesus Christ, his grace, and his peace. Nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rm 8:39*).

When, faced with life's immense fragility, we diminish life's value, we are going against humankind's inherent desire to live. It is understandable to feel that we can no longer accompany a person until their natural death and to think of ending their life because their existence seems unbearable; however, to take a step in this direction is to embark on a path of dehumanization. The conscience of everyone involved, close or distant, from within the family, the medical field and society, can only be damaged if they allow themselves to accept such measures. Humankind was made to respect and serve life in any situation of fragility. We cannot begin to cause the death of innocent lives—regardless of how regulated the decision may be—without hurting our own conscience and human dignity. Causing the death of an innocent human being is causing the death of our own self...

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