

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

As I mentioned in my column last week, during this month of All Saints and All Souls when the Church calls us to consider our own mortality, I want to address some of the important issues related to death and dying. In the previous bulletin I wrote about our moral obligations concerning medical treatment. The bottom line question in these situations is “What is the person going to die from?” If the person is going to die from a lack of water or nutrition, then you’re taking them away too soon. I also mentioned that since we can never know ahead of time the circumstances we will find ourselves in, having a relative or close friend act as your “health care proxy” is a better way to go, *so to speak*, then relying on a “living will.”

Of course the person you appoint should have durable power of attorney for such decisions and be someone who respects your convictions as a Catholic and therefore not likely to starve you to death by denying you nutrition and hydration just because you can't speak for yourself. The moral issues which are related to end of life decisions are treated in greater detail very thoroughly in the document “Comfort and Consolation” which was published by the Catholic Bishops of Maryland in 2007. Copies are available:
www.mdcathcon.org

There are some other points to consider related to end of life issues. First of all, if you ever have to deal with a person who is apparently unconscious or in a coma, treating them with dignity includes what you say when you are around them. It may not seem possible at the time, but they just might be hearing everything you say so speak to them, pray for them but don't speak *about* them as if they're not there.

Along these same lines, caring for our loved ones should also include seeing that they are not subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. It seems that health care institutions believe that it is good for patients who are unconscious to receive sensory stimulation. This makes sense. However, nobody who is already in a helpless condition deserves to be tortured by unwanted exposure to *daytime t.v.*! I think one of the worst things about being in a nursing home or intensive care ward is that you're unable *to shut the d... thing off*. I have already told my family and friends that if I'm unconscious I want Mozart not Jerry Springer.

Finally, it has become common to speak of a person's “quality of life.” Often this is just the prelude to deciding that the person under discussion doesn't deserve to live. If you ever hear someone discussing your “quality of life” you better start saying your prayers while you still have the breath to do so.

The Sacrament of Anointing has never killed anybody.

When we or someone we love is confronting serious illness or major surgery, it is important to request the Sacrament of Anointing. Through this Sacrament the Lord strengthens us spiritually for any suffering we may face. The Lord may also grant us physical healing. If we are ill enough to request Anointing, it's also a good time to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. One of the reasons the Lord gave us the Sacraments is to help us face life's challenges. We do well to make use of them.

Some people hold off requesting this Sacrament because they are concerned that having the priest come to anoint them will somehow hasten their demise or frighten their loved one. Most priests I know are not scary people so please don't hesitate to summon us when things are getting serious.

It's your funeral, so why not plan it yourself?

It is a great kindness to our loved ones to pre-plan our own funeral and burial arrangements. My father battled prostate cancer for a couple of years but when he began to fail I was delegated by my siblings to

approach my parents about their wishes for his funeral. Although it was a little awkward at first bringing it up, once I did my parents were visibly relieved to be able to discuss these matters that were much on their own minds.

Once the subject was out on the table, they were happy to plan every detail. I arranged for them to meet with a funeral director and they picked their own modestly priced caskets. We also discussed their cemetery arrangements. *Many spouses & children end up spending too much for caskets, headstones & limousines because they're making these decisions in a state of shock.*

My parents also planned their funeral Masses, choosing the readings that were used and the hymns. Having heard it so many times at the funerals of their friends, my Mom warned that she would be back to haunt us if she heard "Amazing Grace." *We will happily provide materials for planning funerals to any parishioner who asks. I will also gladly meet with you if you like to explain your options regarding the Mass.*

When my Dad passed away four months later, my mother was spared the burden of trying to handle the details while in a state of grief. Everything was set and went just the way Dad wanted it. The same was true nine years later when Mom passed away. And, just as she asked for, "Just A Closer Walk With Thee" was sung and not "Amazing Grace." So consider planning your own funeral. You'll save your family a lot of trouble and expense.

Next week "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Cremation and the importance of a Catholic burial".

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley