

From the Desk of the Pastor

Dear Parish Family,

So much of our society impacts our ability to practice the Catholic faith in the way the we are called. In modern culture for example it has become acceptable to divorce, or live together prior to marriage. Such aspects of our American culture have slowly crept in, and have deteriorated the foundations of our beliefs as Roman Catholics, attacking the root of our existence. So much of this corrosion has occurred as families are faced with making moral decisions.

I have been approached by some of our faithful family who are concerned with end of life issues. This is the aspect of care of a person that takes place when they are on their dying beds. It is important that every Roman Catholic have predetermined end of life directives clearly understood and documented. I suggest utilizing the Priest For Life website to download appropriate directives for the security of proper measures regarding your end of life decisions.

As Roman Catholics we believe in the process of life. Death is a natural process of life, and nothing should interfere with our living out our lives until natural death. My case in point is the growing awareness of Americas' reliance on hospices. The use of hospice is okay, but it is always important to communicate with the counselors and medical staff of a particular hospice that you are Roman Catholic. They must understand that great care must be taken in the attempt to assist another person with their palliative care, or "comfort care" In many cases, the hospice networks speak of the stages of grief and the idea of dying with dignity.

I believe that Mother Teresa demonstrated the perfect understanding of dying with dignity. She was known for her work in the most poorest areas of the world. Her sisters continue to serve us by meeting those about to die with the deepest of dignity by bringing them into their care. Dying with dignity does not mean that we utilize legal drugs such as morphine inappropriately. In a hospice setting, it is common practice for a family caregiver to receive a comfort kit that includes morphine. It is also possible for non-medically experienced people to administer low doses of morphine to loved ones, slowly keeping them in a coma-like state. Some even fall deeper into a coma, and die from the medically induced use of morphine. Morphine in fact enhances death in such cases. As Roman Catholics, we must balance the truths of the faith with the availability of certain technologies and procedures. Just because abortion is legal in the United States and it can be done, doesn't mean it should be done. Just because we have means to assist in the comfort of our dying people, doesn't mean we have the right to take it too far. Remember God is the Author of life, He determines when and how it is to begin and end.

Each end of life case must be looked at separately, and it is always important to make certain that you remain in communication with your parish priest as moral decisions are being made for yourself or a loved one.

As Roman Catholics it is totally appropriate to request that our end of life issues be handled with the dignity that God intended. We should make sure that anyone on their dying bed is hydrated, nourished, and comfortable at all times. Removing feeding tubes prematurely or not allowing hydration through intravenous feedings is against what we believe as Roman Catholics.

In my experience as a priest, it is often observed that family members choose to remove feeding tubes days before a person may pass away. This often comes from the directives of non-Catholic hospices. In such cases dehydration is present, which can make for an uncomfortable death. In many cases, sometimes the person stops eating, and even cannot accept a feeding tube, but IV's are always an acceptable and humane moral practice to ensure such people die with dignity.

Many questions are also asked regarding death, funeral arrangements, and cremation. Since the Second Vatican Council, it has been permitted to practice cremation as an alternative to the typical burial of a body. Cremation is an acceptable form of burial in the Roman Catholic Church, but it is never appropriate to keep urns with cremations on mantles, or in homes. It is never appropriate to practice the spreading of ashes of a loved one. The Church encourages a full Christian Burial that includes the Vigil, or Rosary, the Mass of Resurrection, and Graveside Interment. If cremation is sought, then it is best if the body is present at the funeral prior to cremation. The ashes of a person should always be buried on blessed ground within a Catholic cemetery or public cemetery.

The official rite of funerals for the Church reflect the three days that Christ spent in the tomb, before He rose, destroying both sin and death forever. As Roman Catholics, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is our most important prayer. We believe that heaven and earth are joined each and every time we celebrate and proclaim the death of the Lord through the Eucharist. How appropriate then to ensure that a mass is celebrated on behalf of the deceased. It is encouraged that masses be celebrated for our deceased loved ones as often as possible. Birthdays and anniversaries are often good times to schedule mass intentions.

The funeral mass is a ceremonial experience that also gives necessary closure to loved ones as they grieve. One of the most beautiful liturgies of the Roman Catholic Church is the funeral liturgy. By remaining faithful to the Corporal Works of Mercy we as Roman Catholics promise to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, and bury the dead. Let us take to heart what it is to be a Catholic Christian, and begin to allow the Church to form us rather than the values of our society.

Peace and Good Will,

Fr. Michael D. Accinni Reinhardt  
Pastor OLPH-Glendale