



The Catholic  
Archdiocese  
of Edmonton

## Every Life Matters Easter Series

### Session I

### Seeing with God's Eyes

Now that we have heard from our two presenters, how do we begin our response? What are we to make of all this? As I mentioned in the introductory message, the mindset informing and shaping our new legal landscape is decidedly unchristian. The message conveyed by the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, together with the recommendations of the Special Joint Committee, is both clear and chilling: there are some lives that are simply not worth living. Of course, we beg to differ. Our approach to life is in no way shaped by the legal findings of the Justices of the Supreme Court or the particular views of select Parliamentarians. As a Catholic people we allow our mindset to be shaped by Jesus Christ, who is God's Word made flesh, and by the teachings of his Church.

Allow me to share a story. Once as a priest I was substituting in a parish where the pastor was on vacation. This parish had responsibility for pastoral care in the local hospital. Before leaving, the pastor showed me where he kept the oils for the sacrament of the sick and the ritual book, because I was likely to receive calls to anoint patients. Sure enough, one night I received a call indicating that a woman was in need of the sacrament. Assuming it was an emergency I grabbed the oils and book and raced to the hospital. I went quickly to the room, only to find an elderly female patient sitting up in bed reading a book. I learned that she was having major surgery the next day and was wanting to celebrate the sacrament of the sick beforehand. I realized then that I had some time to prepare the ritual book, so I took a few minutes to turn pages, set ribbons, then turn some more pages and set some more ribbons. The woman patiently watched all this with a rather amused expression, until finally she said, "Father! A person could be dead by the time you found the right page!"

I share this not to make light of a serious situation, of course. I want to draw your attention to a couple of points. First, the woman's words now prove to be rather prophetic. We all need to be "on the right page" in matters of illness, suffering and death. The legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia is placing our country squarely on the wrong one. None of us wants to die before we are on the right page. That is why this series of presentations aims to open for us the sources on which that page is to be found: Sacred Scripture and our Catholic Tradition. Second, notice the instinct that moved the woman to call. There is a Catholic instinct that comes to the fore when we are gravely ill, facing serious surgery, or approaching death: Send for the priest! This has its roots in Sacred Scripture, in the letter of James: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the [priests] of the Church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord." (James 5:14)

Our calling for the priest and the consolation we receive from the sacrament of the sick form a clear signal that our approach as Catholics to sickness, suffering and death is very different from the attitude we now see manifested through the Supreme Court decision and subsequent legislative developments.

Our approach is one of Christian hope, arising from our faith that the Lord is near, present in our suffering, healing our souls and leading us through death to the eternal life his own dying and rising made possible.

Nevertheless, the events now unfolding around us have raised in the minds of many people questions of great depth and enormous consequence. What does it mean to be a human being? What is the meaning of life itself? How are we to understand the place of suffering? How am I supposed to face death? Did we do the right thing when we ended the treatment that was keeping our loved one alive? To these questions a myriad of conflicting and confusing answers is being offered. Terminology is fluid, as, for example, when it is proposed that the killing of someone who is suffering should be understood as medical care. This can leave us deeply perplexed and often unsure of the decisions we should be making.

From this very unclear situation arises a particularly clear urgency: the need for wisdom. Here I am not speaking of the wisdom of the most learned or experienced. I speak rather out of the Christian tradition that understands true wisdom as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis describes wisdom in terms that are very appropriate to the reality we face right now. He speaks of it as seeing with God's eyes (cf. General Audience, April 9, 2014). Here we are taken swiftly to the very root of the problem facing us. The decision in favour of assisted suicide and euthanasia is a decision to "close one's eyes," that is, to refuse to see the truth of the sanctity of every human life. Only with eyes thus closed can we begin even to think that some lives are less worth living than others. So the call is clear: we must open our eyes to truth and pray for the gift of seeing as God sees so as thus to receive and live from true wisdom.

How does God see? To answer this, let's turn briefly to Sacred Scripture.

Consider, for example, what the Bible teaches us in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis in the account given there of Creation. At the end of each day God looked upon what he had made and declared it good. After he created man and woman God looked upon creation and declared it to be very good. Only the man and woman, we are told, are created "in the image and likeness of God". This expression - "image and likeness" - means that God has created human beings to be his counterpart in the world, to be in a relationship of love with him. This establishes the basis of the inviolable and inalienable dignity of the human being. Looking with God's eyes we see that each and every human being is a unique unrepeatable subject; not a somebody or a something, but a someone, a person. Pope Benedict put it beautifully when he said in his first homily as Supreme Pontiff: "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

These truths of the human person brought to light by the contemplative gaze of God at creation are affirmed dramatically by the loving scrutiny of Jesus Christ. The Gospels recount a few episodes from the life of Jesus in which he so looks upon an individual as to see and reveal that person's true identity before God. Consider when he first met St. Peter. The Gospel of John tells us: "Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter)." (John 1:42)

Or his gaze is one of mercy that makes clear how we need to change and grow. Think of the rich young man seeking to know what he must do to attain eternal life. The Gospel of Mark recalls that, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'" (Mark 10:21)

The gaze of Jesus reveals that, in the eyes of God, we are precious. It matters not what we may have achieved in life or what now we are able to contribute; it is of no account how healthy we are or at what stage or in what circumstance of life we find ourselves. God's love is absolutely unconditional and irrevocable. In his sight there is no life that is not worth living. To him, every life matters, every life is "very good".

We can appreciate right away that there is an immediate consequence flowing from the gift of wisdom. Seeing with God's eyes expands our field of vision and, in so doing, limits our sphere of action. Since every human life is unconditionally the object of God's love, then we simply cannot - we dare not - presume to judge the worth of another person's life or pronounce upon its quality. All the more, the truth of human dignity as revealed by God's eyes imposes an absolute prohibition against the taking of innocent human life. God alone is the author and arbiter of human life, and God has pronounced every person's life worthy of being lived to its natural end.

Let me conclude tonight's remarks with reference to the particular moment in history in which we find ourselves. Pope Francis has declared this time to be a Jubilee of Mercy. He asks us not only to understand the Christian meaning of mercy but also to make it the central reality that governs our relationships with one another. In God's sight, killing is not mercy. Killing can never be mercy. To speak, as some do, of assisted suicide and euthanasia as acts of mercy is a gross distortion of the term. We understand true mercy only when we return the gaze of Jesus and recognize in him "the merciful face of the Father." (Cf. Bull of Indiction) He alone teaches what mercy is. He is mercy Incarnate.

This opening session of our series of reflections coincides with Divine Mercy Sunday, the day instituted by St. John Paul II, who eleven years ago died on the vigil of this Feast. Let us entrust these days to the intercession of this great defender of the sanctity of human life. By the help of his prayers, may we all learn to be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful (cf. Luke 6:36) and to affirm, by our acts of authentic mercy, the beauty and goodness of each human life and the truth that every life matters.

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