Day of Prayer – Called to Care, Not to Kill

A Pastoral Letter on Assisted Suicide

Sunday 4th May

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last year we alerted you to a Bill in the Scottish Parliament to introduce assisted suicide for citizens in Scotland aged sixteen and over.

We urged you to contact your MSPs, asking them to reject this dangerous proposal which devalues human life in itself and puts our most vulnerable brothers and sisters under terrible pressure to take their lives prematurely. We advised you to encourage your MSPs to champion the improvement of palliative care instead across Scotland.

Thankfully, many of you wrote to or met your MSPs to express your concerns and it has influenced a number of them to oppose the bill.

Now we are reaching another critical stage in the process where two bills, one before the Westminster parliament and the other before the Holyrood parliament, are coming up for their next voting stage in the coming weeks.

So, the Bishops of Scotland are calling the Catholic community to a **Day of Prayer today, Sunday 4th May**: to pray for our parliamentarians to cast their vote to care and not to kill; and to pray for Catholics across Scotland to reach out to their MSPs and MPs to urge them to work to improve palliative care and reject assisted suicide.

Assisted suicide, allows the state to provide the means of killing our brothers and sisters. Not only is this wrong in itself but it takes us down a dangerous spiral that inevitably harms the most vulnerable members of our society, by which we mean the elderly, the disabled and those who struggle with mental health; all those, in fact, who cannot stand up for themselves. One of the tests of good law is that it ensures our weakest citizens can feel safe. This law does the opposite and frightens the most vulnerable all around us.

When vulnerable people, including the elderly and disabled, express concerns about being a burden, the appropriate response is not to suggest that they have a duty to die. Rather, it is to commit ourselves to meeting their needs and providing the care and compassion they need to help them live.

Until now, we have trusted our doctors without question to be on the side of our life, health and wellbeing. It is wrong to think of them asking our loved ones if they would be better off dead. Introducing killing as medical treatment would, at a stroke, end all confidence in our treasured doctor patient relationship.

At a time when suicide is on the rise in Scotland and we are doing our best to reduce it, what message are we sending when we say that suicide is the right choice provided it is overseen by a doctor? Laws like this normalise suicide and, with it, the false idea that some people's lives are beyond hope

We all feel compassion for those who are terminally ill and dying and are perhaps in fear of a painful death. Our desire for better palliative care is about ensuring those at the final stages of life feel valued, treated with compassion, given the benefit of modern pain relief and helped feel some peace at the end. We owe a common responsibility to each other, especially to those who are weak, ill and dying. Legalising assisted suicide amounts to a rejection of this shared duty. Focussing the energies of both parliaments on improving palliative care, which is underfunded and inaccessible to many, is the right and the better way to go.

We invite you to join us in praying at today's Masses and in your personal and family prayers for the defeat of assisted suicide, the safety of the vulnerable and the dignity of life.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ John Keenan, President, Bishop of Paisley
+ Brian McGee, Vice-President, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles
+ Andrew McKenzie, Episcopal Secretary, Bishop of Dunkeld
+ Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh
+ William Nolan, Archbishop of Glasgow
+ Joseph Toal, Bishop of Motherwell
+ Hugh Gilbert, Bishop of Aberdeen
+ Francis Dougan, Bishop of Galloway