

## 33<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY

I am sure that many, if not all of you, would have been deeply disappointed by the passing of the End of Life Bill on Wednesday. It means that, short of a miracle, people who have a terminal illness and have a prognosis of less than six months to live, will now be able to demand that a doctor give them a lethal injection.

As Catholics we believe that life is a precious gift given to us by God. Life is to be embraced with gratitude, to be enjoyed and to be used fruitfully. It is not for us, for example, to mess up our ability to think by taking drugs. It is certainly not for us to terminate our lives by an act of suicide. In the words of the Catholic Catechism: "We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us."

For people who believe in God, the foremost question for any action we intend taking has to be: "Is what I am about to do the Will of God?" As we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It has been the consistent teaching of the Church that suicide is an action in defiance of God's Will. As Christians get closer and closer to death, the Church calls on them to do as Jesus did. They are to place their deaths into the Hands of God- knowing that the All-loving God will give them the courage that they need. They are to call on God to use whatever pain or frustration they may go through to effect spiritual growth in themselves and their family; just as God used Jesus' death on the Cross to effect the redemption of humankind.

For people who do not believe in God, such thoughts are pure folly. The foremost question as they face death is often "What is the point of any further suffering? Isn't it far better to just sink into oblivion?"

In the last census 48.6% of our population declared that they had no religion. A further 6.7% refused to answer the question. Pointing to the reality that over half of our population either has no belief in God or, at the most, a very vague one. Hence the problem so many have in understanding the opposition of Catholics have to euthanasia, abortion and many other life issues.

As we watch the News on TV or read our Newspapers we are constantly inundated with bad news. During the week we have heard of calamitous bushfires in Australia and terrible floods in Venice.

We have also heard of riots in Hong Kong, in Indonesia, in Chile and in Catalonia. We have heard of Palestinian and Israeli forces firing deadly rockets at each other. We have heard of China boasting of having a new unstoppable weapon based on drone technology. It can all be very frightening.

And I think this is where today's Gospel fits in. If nothing else, it gives us perspective and hope. Because it underlines our belief in the final triumph of God which will issue in the glorious Kingdom of God.

But before God's Kingdom is finally put into place there will continue to be horrible disasters. As Jesus said: "Nation will fight against nation. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there and many fearful sights. You will be seized, and tried by kings and governors because of my Name. You will be hated."

Yes- right until the end of time there will be continuous turmoil on Earth. We are to have courage. Jesus promises us: "I myself will give you wisdom in speaking against your adversaries- a wisdom they will be powerless to resist."

The Prophet Malachi speaks about the Coming of the Lord on the Last Day in a picturesque way. He says that God's rays will shine on the evil and on the good. The evil will feel the sun of righteousness, the radiance of God's Love, as a burning heat and will flee. But those who honour God's Name will find healing and deep-down warmth in these same rays and be very much at home.

All of history is being drawn towards a time of final vindication. The essential message for all of us is to 'hang in there'. Tough as the present times may be, God is with us.

In the coming year there will be fierce debate in our communities over Assisted Suicide as the date of the referendum approaches. A real tragedy would be if we, as Catholics, simply vanish into the crowd and lose our identity and sense of mission. In the words of Thomas Merton: "The greatest temptation of modern man is to escape into the great formless sea of irresponsibility which is the crowd."

In the midst of our chaotic world we as a Church are called by God to be messengers of hope and bearers of light. Above all we are to be witnesses to God's truth.