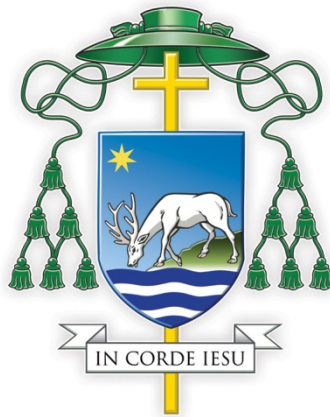


BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD



A LETTER FROM BISHOP PHILIP to Canon Michael Hore, the Clergy and Faithful of the Parish of Our Lady and the Saints of Guernsey for Palm Sunday 2018

My Dearest Parishioners,

'Thou shalt not kill' (Ex 20: 13) and the injunction 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mk 12: 31) are commandments that form the bedrock of not only Jewish and Christian morality but the teaching of all religions. Moreover, they are instinctive principles written deeply into every human heart. They ground the laws that govern every civilised society on earth. This is why the current proposal in Guernsey to legalise assisted suicide, so-called 'mercy killing,' is fundamentally subversive, horrific and dangerous, however well-intentioned.

Many a vet will speak of their grief at putting down a beloved family pet – "putting it out of its misery" - yet surely we cannot treat a human being the same way? It would be an intolerable and utterly immoral demand to ask medical staff, doctors and nurses dedicated to preserving life, to extinguish the life of another human person. However carefully crafted the laws might be, assisted suicide would place medics in an impossible dilemma.

Frailty, pain and infirmity are a difficult trial for anyone. Those who are mentally ill may experience despair and gloom at the problems they face. Others, the terminally ill become anguished at the loss of function and mobility, feeling keenly a sense of burden on family and even a financial burden on society. Yet let us thank God for the amazing advances that medical science has made and the level of true loving care that can now be given. Modern drugs and modern methods mean that in today's world, palliative care doctors and nurses can use their skills and knowledge to ensure that pain is properly managed at the end of life. Indeed, as a Christian, I would go further and say that in union with Christ it is even possible to find from Him all the strength, patience and energy we need to sustain our suffering – to 'carry the cross' (Mt 16: 24) - and to turn it to a positive good for others. That is the meaning of Holy Week, when Jesus Christ willingly underwent death at the hands of those who had decided it was better for society for Him to be extinguished.

Assisting someone to die prematurely or assisting someone to commit suicide, even when they earnestly request it, can *never ever* be a compassionate action. It is a grave sin. We must not yield to the temptation to apply rapid or drastic solutions, moved by a false compassion or by criteria of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Instead, we need to shew respect, understanding and tenderness to patients who are seriously ill so that the sacred value of their life can shine forth with splendour in their suffering. Modern palliative care, an area in which the UK is a world leader, enables this.

So I appeal to all people of good will in Guernsey to overturn this grim proposal coming before the State legislature, and at the same time to redouble the compassionate care of those who are frail and terminally ill. Let there be no death-clinics in Guernsey. Assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with a doctor's role as healer. It would be difficult or impossible to control and it would pose serious societal risks. The right to die would soon become the duty to die. Consider for example that since Belgium legalised assisted suicide and euthanasia in 2002, they have since extended this practice to children. This is just one horrifying example of where this sort of legislation can lead.

I appeal to Catholics to mobilise. Speak out against this proposal. It is never permissible to do good by an evil means. To quote the Church's *Catechism*:

"Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia, ... [that is] putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons .. is morally unacceptable. Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded (2277)."

We believe in assisted living, not assisted dying. Death is not pain relief but the beginning of a new, resurrected life with God our Father and Creator. This future depends on the state of our soul when we die and this perspective rightly affects our decisions on end of life care and how best to uphold a patient's personal dignity. Someone near the end of life needs emotional support, comfort and care, good pain control, respect and loving communication – not suicide on prescription. Let us redouble our efforts to offer this support, not least to anyone tempted to suicide or a hurried death.

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

25th March 2018,
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion