



Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time and the Season of Lent 11th and 14th February 2024
Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name” (Psalm 30:4)

Recently my attention was drawn to this online article from the Catholic Herald (01.02.24) “The terrible truth about ‘assisted dying’: Lessons from Canada and Australia”. Just before Christmas the well known broadcaster Esther Rantzen lent her support to the “assisted dying” lobby and the result is the whole debate about it has risen to the top of the media agenda. This Sunday we have an option of a Second Collection for “Life”, the well known Charity originating with the Scarisbrick Family in Leamington Spa in our Archdiocese. We recall the wonderful work it has done and continues to do especially to promote the right to life for unborn children. All sorts of arguments are made to terminate life and, while there are ‘hard cases’ that move you to understand why some people might be tempted to take that sad option, we can see how abortion has become just one of those “rights” that everyone has: thousands and thousands of lives are taken without giving it a second thought, and of course much money is made from it.

Now the legislation of “assisted dying” is being promoted in what Pope Francis calls our “throw away” culture. Once more the “hard cases” are being put forward as the reason for it. So, it is good to be aware of where this argument can lead to. The article I refer to in the Catholic Herald is available online and it highlights the examples of Canada which permitted Euthanasia in 2016 and has extended to people with disabilities and, from March, those with mental illness can qualify too. In Australia the experiment began modestly only a year after Canada claiming ‘voluntary assisted dying’ would lower suicide rates among the sick and elderly. Research conducted by Professor Jones of the Oxford-based Anscombe Bioethics Centre, has found that the number of actual suicides has risen by 50 per cent in Victoria since the law has come into force. The Australian Capital Territory will join the club later this year and Euthanasia will be offered widely, children and demented included! Deaths by Euthanasia in Canada have soared, the Herald Article tells us and last year almost 14,000 people died at the hands of their doctors. I was shocked to read: “One doctor boasted how she ended the lives of about 400 patients in a single year, saying it was the most “rewarding work” she has ever done.”

Reflecting on the Gospel for the Sixth Sunday about the cleansing of the leper my mind turns to those who can easily be ‘outcast’. The leper was kept apart, and this happens quite frequently today to those who have more serious forms of dementia. You can see there could be pressure to save the costs involved in caring for them. The approach of

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



Jesus to the leper is radically different from that of the community at the time: you see him touch the leper and heal him. This reaching out to the leper resulted in Jesus Himself becoming 'unclean' and having *"to stay outside in places where nobody lived."* Jesus trades places with the leper. Fr Ernest Ferlita in his commentary says *"Jesus acts out of compassion. Compassion is a passing over into the experience of the other, and entering into the other's suffering; but not only that, it is experiencing the other's desire for wholeness and doing all one can to bring the other back."* The reality for many of us is that we don't want to face suffering or pain either in our own lives or in the lives of others: we will do all we can to avoid it.

On Wednesday 14 February we are invited by the Church to the Ceremony of the Imposition of Ashes where a Cross is placed on our foreheads. There is no other way to the fullness of life Jesus tells us than to take up our Cross and follow Him. Lent, a word meaning Spring, begins on Ash Wednesday and leads up to Good Friday when Jesus enters into our suffering and death with us. It is a time for reforming our lives in the light of God's Word in the Scriptures. Choosing a Scripture verse for the theme of my weekly Reflection in the Burning Bush vlog I chose the final line of the Entrance Antiphon for the Sixth Sunday *"Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name."* Lent is indeed a special time to enter into the thinking of the Church on matters of life and death.

The mystery of the Cross is at the heart of an article by a Theologian, Gregory Hillis, I have just read entitled "How Julian of Norwich's writings on suffering have helped me as a cancer patient." I quote just a few lines:

Although he rose again and can no longer suffer, Julian still writes, *"he suffers with us"* even now when we suffer. *"If we come to understand that God suffers alongside us as one who truly knows what it means to suffer, our anger morphs into love and our suffering mysteriously becomes a means of transformation."*

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese