

August 11, 2019

NJ Aid in Dying Law

by Bishop David O'Connell

As of August 1, New Jersey's "Aid in Dying" legislation is the law of the state. This legislation is morally wrong on so many levels. It flies in the face of what our Founding Fathers believed. It flies in the face of what the Church believes and teaches.

As we witness the slow but steady erosion in contemporary culture of the conviction that all human life is sacred and worth preserving at every moment from conception through natural death, I call upon all Catholics within the Diocese of Trenton, indeed, upon all people of goodwill, to recommit themselves to the belief that God is the only Creator and source of all human life and that, therefore, God alone has the right to determine its natural end.

Everyone who lives will eventually die. That's the way God made us and there are no exceptions and no escape. No one wants, seeks or enjoys sickness, suffering or the pain that touches every one of us in this journey through natural human life. But natural human life is, truly, a journey from its first moments in the womb through its last heartbeat and breath on earth. And God our Creator is the thread that ties every moment, every instance of that journey together from beginning to end. Laws do not alter that reality, try as they might. Laws should not interrupt that continuum, try as they do. Death brings the same result whether legal or not; whether through someone else's assistance or by one's own hand; whether natural or induced.

The only real "death with dignity" is the one that follows a full "life with dignity" as God our Creator has designed and intends it to be, with all its natural, God-given and human moments. Anything else is a rejection of God our Creator as Creator and an affront to the human nature God has implanted within us, one and all.

The so-called "Death with Dignity Act" -- physician or "anybody else" assisted suicide -- is another tragic example of human hubris, re-creating God in our own image; imposing our own limits upon God's law and will and wisdom; exhausting God's otherwise inexhaustible mystery and merciful companionship in our journey through the natural, fully human life God alone can give. And when sickness comes to those we love, it is our obligation to care even when there is no cure. I write these reflections as Bishop and shepherd, yes, but even more personally as a son who stood with his brothers by their parents' sides as they breathed their last. Although now that it has become law in New Jersey to bring about the end of life, it is an option and a choice that we should never make.