

## **HOMILY HELPS | Accompaniment at the End of Life**

*These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons preach on the importance of end-of-life care and accompaniment based on the teachings of [Samaritanus bonus](#). These notes can be integrated into a homily at any time during the year and used in full or in part.*

### **The Dignity of the Human Person and the End of Life**

- The ultimate foundation of human dignity lies in the reality that God became man to save us and calls us to communion with him. Whatever our physical or psychological condition, as human persons we always retain our original dignity as created in the image of God. Life is a sacred and inviolable gift, and every human person has a vocation to a unique relationship with the One who gives life. God offers life and its dignity to man as a precious gift to safeguard and nurture.
- Despite our best efforts, it can be hard to recognize the profound value of human life when we see its weakness and fragility. While the mystery of suffering raises limitless questions about the meaning of life, the faithful care of human life until its natural end is entrusted to *every* person.
- Every individual who cares for the sick has the moral responsibility to recognize the inalienable good that is the human person and adhere to the highest standards of respect by safeguarding human life until natural death. We must make it clear to those approaching death that care will be provided until the very end: “*to cure if possible, always to care.*”<sup>i</sup> Such accompaniment can help the dying to persevere in sanctifying grace.
- Pope Francis has spoken of a “throw-away culture”<sup>ii</sup> where victims are the weakest human beings, “discarded” when we aim for efficiency at all costs. John Paul II described this phenomenon as a “culture of death,”<sup>iii</sup> in which good and evil are confused. In this culture of waste and death, euthanasia and assisted suicide emerge as erroneous solutions to the challenge of caring for those who are terminally ill. The value of human life, the meaning of suffering, and the significance of the time preceding death are all eclipsed.

### **The Witness of the Good Samaritan\***

- In 2020, the Vatican issued a letter, *Samaritanus bonus*, which provides guidance and reflections on the care of those nearing the end of their earthly life using the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- The Good Samaritan who goes out of his way to aid an injured man (cf. Lk 10:30-37) symbolizes Jesus, who encounters man in need of salvation and cares for his wounds and sufferings. Jesus taught, “*Do unto others whatever you would have them do to you*” (Mt 7:12). Care for life is therefore our first responsibility.

- The mystery of the Redemption of the human person is rooted in the loving involvement of God with human suffering. That is why we can entrust ourselves to God and convey this certainty to the person who is suffering or fearful of pain and death. The invitation to imitate the Samaritan’s example— “*Go and do likewise*” (*Lk 10:37*)—cautions us not to underestimate the full human potential of presence, availability, welcoming, and involvement. Such accompaniment is part of the path defined by authentic hospice and palliative care.
- The Good Samaritan, who puts his brother in difficulty at the center of his heart, offers him whatever is required to repair his wound of desolation and to open his heart to the luminous beams of hope. Healed by Jesus, we become men and women called to proclaim his healing power and provide care for our neighbors.
- Hope is always possible. “Every individual must feel as if called personally to bear witness to love in suffering.”<sup>iv</sup> The Church learns from the Good Samaritan how to care for the terminally ill, for the gospel of life is a gospel of compassion and mercy.

\* Gospel reading for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.

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<sup>i</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the participants in the International Congress “Life sustaining treatments and vegetative state. Scientific progress and ethical dilemmas”* (20 March 2004), 7: *AAS* 96 (2004), 489.

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), 53: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1042; See also: Id., *Address to a delegation from the Dignitatis Humanae Institute* (7 December 2013): *AAS* 106 (2014) 14-15; Id., *Meeting of the Pope with the Elderly* (28 September 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014) 759-760.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (25 March 1995), 12: *AAS* 87 (1995), 414.

<sup>iv</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* (11 February 1984), 29: *AAS* 76 (1984), 246.