

**Good Friday Homily, Sts. V & O Cathedral, Winnipeg**  
**29 April 2016**  
**Metropolitan Lawrence**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the most emotional and moving scenes in the gospel account of Jesus' final hours was when, close to death, He spoke to his mother Mary and the disciple John at the foot of the cross. Here is the short text from the gospel according to St. John.

***Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom He loved, He said to his mother: "Woman, behold, your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. [Jn. 19:25-27]***

Shortly after this the evangelist adds: ***When Jesus had taken the wine, He said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, He handed over the spirit. [Jn. 19:30]*** In another words Jesus died.

Earlier, during the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, we heard how Jesus had prayed to his heavenly Father asking, if possible, to let this suffering pass him by. But then He quickly added his acceptance with the words: " ... ***yet, not as I will, but as you will.***" [Mt. 26:39]

We have here a powerful lesson from Christ the teacher at this darkest hour both for him and all humanity. The first lesson is that God the Father, his heavenly Father, is the author of life. God gives life to us and God takes back life to himself. The second lesson is that even at the point when Jesus is about to lose his life, He reaches out to those He loves, namely his mother Mary and his beloved disciple John, and shows concern that they would support each other after Jesus is gone.

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

In these present days the government of Canada is debating a bill to make legal physician assisted death. We are hearing much in the news about this issue, generally in favour of helping people choose to die with the assistance of medical officials once their suffering is considered to be unbearable. Often examples are given that present very emotional situations where persons want to end their lives. This is especially the case since the highest Court of Canada has now permitted it. Why, they say, should others infringe on their autonomy and independence, including the decision whether to live or die?

The gospel texts quoted above are at the very heart of the response of the Catholic Church to this issue. If ever there was anyone who could claim to be in total control of his life, it was Jesus. After all He was the Son of God. He was the one who healed

the sick, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead back to life. And yet He accepted the will of God regarding the final hours of his life on earth. Jesus works hand in hand with God in life and in death, and this is the truth He shows us.

Since the creation of Adam and Eve humanity has been tempted to be like gods. The serpent in the garden of Eden said this when he told them to eat of the forbidden fruit: “ ... **the moment you eat of it your eyes will be open and you will be like gods ...**” [Gen. 3:5] As faithful children of God, we are all called to work together with our heavenly Father with the life He creates, and in so doing, to share eternal life with him at the end of times. It is Almighty God, the creator of the universe, who is the true author of life

The second truth taught to us by Jesus on the cross is our responsibility to care for those around us, especially the elderly, the abandoned, the sick and the dying. The concern of Jesus is for his mother and her care once He would no longer be with her. In Canada this care for those in need can take many forms. But in regards to the sick and the dying it is in the form of palliative care that we need to direct our attention both as a nation and as individuals.

Health Care has always been a concern of the Catholic Church throughout history. In Canada the pioneers in health care establishing hospitals and nursing homes have been the religious sisters, including our Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate. Like the disciple John, Jesus calls on us to care for the elderly and those in need of our love. And like his mother Mary, Jesus calls on us to teach the younger generations the gospel truths about the true meaning of our lives. In Canada we have excellent examples of Palliative Care facilities. We need to encourage our government and health care providers to establish palliative care on a national basis, available to all citizens of this country.

And so, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as we come forward now to venerate the figure of Jesus in the grave let us not shake our heads and say what a shame – He was so young! Rather, let us pray to the one who died for us that we may learn the true meaning of life and death from his example. And like Jesus let us reaffirm the sacredness of life and carry out our part in God’s great plan of salvation.

AMEN