

## **Encounter with the Dying**

Gerard S. Brungardt, MD, BeL

[www.brungardtmd.com](http://www.brungardtmd.com)

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“Jesus did not come to explain away suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with his presence.” Paul Claudel

“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” Deus Caritas Est (1) Benedict XVI

“Christianity, even before being a sum of doctrines or a rule for salvation, is thus the “event” of an encounter.” John Paul II in his letter to Luigi Giussani on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Movement of Communion and Liberation

“Following Christ is thus the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality ... More radically, it involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father ... he is the way, and the truth, and the life ...” Veritatis Splendor 19

“Christian morality consists, in the simplicity of the Gospel, in following Jesus Christ, in abandoning oneself to him, in letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church” Veritatis Splendor 119

“Faith, worship and ethos are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's agape. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart.” Deus Caritas Est 14

“No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others.” Deus Caritas Est 18

“The source of being moral is loving someone, not fulfilling laws.” “Is It Possible to Live This Way? vol. 2 Hope, p. 117. Msgr. Luigi Giussani.

Caring for the dying and those nearing the end of life requires, more than anything else, our presence – that we be attentive, receptive and responsive to those in need. As family members, friends, physicians, health care professionals and others involved, the most important thing we can give to the dying person is our love and friendship ... accompanying them on their journey.

All too commonly there is the impulse to “explain away” or reduce the situation to “lofty ideas”. This does not meet the *needs* of the person and their family *now*. Or we may hope we can “remove” the problem by making and rationalizing the right “ethical choices”. This does not address the desires, the hearts of the person and family members. Many of the key issues and concerns in end of life care today reflect this tendency to reduce the drama of caring for the dying to a ‘spiritualism’ of ideas and explanations or to a ‘moralism’ of acts, doctrines and choices.

*Advance Directives* are an attempt to decide the acts and choices now for situations that will arise in the future. Key point – assign a durable power of attorney for health care.

The notion that we all die a natural death is overshadowed by a *Therapeutic Obstinacy* that entraps the person and family in a ‘prison of technical mercy’ (Berry). Key point – The majority of people who die today do so after a specific decision to limit therapeutic interventions. The patient weighs the benefits against the burdens of continued care. “A person may forgo extraordinary or disproportionate means of preserving life. Disproportionate means are those that in the patient's judgment do not offer a reasonable hope of benefit or entail an excessive burden, or impose excessive expense on the family or the community.” (ERD 57)

The provision of *food and water* is often treated as if it is an “on-off” choice, i.e. that one either gets the full allotment of food and water that an active healthy adult would get or else one receives nothing at all in the way of food and water. Key point – We always provide the food and water the patient needs. Toward the end-of-life our food and water needs become dramatically less.

“Both the artificial extension of human life and the hastening of death, although they stem from different principles, conceal the same assumption: the conviction that life and death are realities entrusted to human beings to be disposed of at will. It must be made clear again that life is a gift to be responsibly led in God’s sight.” JPII Rennweg Hospice 1998.