

PASTORAL LETTER

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**SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

CHERISHING LIFE

In the past weeks we were shaken by several acts of terrorism that cut short the lives of many people. In a few weeks, in France, Germany and Iraq, these terror attacks killed children and their parents, young people and scores of others. As we know, a few days ago an elderly priest was murdered at the altar during the celebration of Mass. These cruel acts against life shock us all.

Nevertheless, as Pope Francis reminded us on his return to the Vatican from a pilgrimage with young people in Poland, the right to life is also being threatened in less dramatic ways, but no less terrible, so much so that the Pope calls such acts as “the first form of terrorism”. Pope Francis is referring to what he calls “throwaway culture” – a culture in which human beings are discarded as waste. Such a culture prioritizes money over people. Pope Francis reminds us that this culture kills unborn babies, abandons the old, forsakes people with disabilities, values people according to their potential contribution to the economy and their consumption, and is unjust with the poor. The exploitation of the environment that enriches the few and steals from the many is also typical of this culture.

Protecting life always and everywhere

There might be some people who think that at first glance there is no link between all of the above. However, the Pope stresses the intrinsic link that exists between each and every one of these characteristics. We must always protect life, everywhere and at every stage. This is not enough. We must also work together to improve the quality of life in every aspect.

We Christians have a special duty to cherish life because for us, human life is a gift from God, who alone is its master from the beginning to its end. No human being, therefore, can assume for himself the right to directly destroy the innocent life of another, or to regard some persons as having no value or as obstacles.

The Law must protect the defence of every human life from its conception to death, especially when a person is in a vulnerable or disadvantageous position.

In our country, we must all strive for the complete respect for the right to life, lived in its full dignity. During the past few months, two particular issues that have been raised may threaten life at its beginning and its natural end.

A threat to life from its beginning

The life of the human being, from the very first days of its existence, can be threatened when pills or other medicines are taken with the aim that the life that has been conceived in the womb is prevented from developing, rather, destroyed. The effect of certain pills in certain circumstances can be abortifacient. A person who is seriously living according to his or her Christian beliefs has the moral obligation to inform herself fully about all the effects of these medicinal products in order to take responsible decisions in favour of life.

In case of scientific doubt on how these medicinal products work, the decision must always be in favour of the protection of life. The conscience of health-care professionals, who have objections to prescribe or to sell these medicinal products because of scientific doubts about their effects, must be respected.

Euthanasia: a threat to life

The issue of euthanasia has also come to the fore in recent weeks. There are some who reason that when a person is going through severe suffering, human life loses its value and therefore this person has the right to be assisted to take his or her life. We understand the psychological and the physical suffering that the patient and his or her relatives would be going through. Certainly we do feel for each person who is experiencing such suffering. However, we also believe that the value of human life does not depend on whether the person is healthy or satisfied with the quality of his or her life. We also believe that euthanasia can never be in the best interest of the patient.

Pope Francis has been very clear about this issue in several of his speeches. Indeed, he calls euthanasia and assisted suicide as “serious threats to families worldwide” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 48).

Every person has a right to treatment, and society has the moral obligation to provide medical services in defence of this right to life. Every person reserves the legal and moral right to refuse medical treatment that does not offer any hope, which involves exorbitant costs or inconvenience, or incurs severe pain and suffering. At the same time, however, every care must be provided to alleviate psychological and physical pain until the process of death takes its natural course.

Adding care and not offering death

The more intense suffering becomes, society must increase all the more the measures and structures that offer solace and encouragement so that no one is put aside or considered burdensome on others. A society shows its merciful face when vulnerable persons are supported and helped. In our country, we must strengthen our medical services in order to alleviate pain and assist all those who work in this sector to increase and extend the services already being offered in the community to so many patients with terminal illness and to their relatives.

The Church in Malta will be working with the Hospice Movement on *Dar il-Hniena* (House of Mercy), a new residence that will provide high quality services specializing in palliative care to terminally ill patients.

We would like to express our great admiration to many families who greatly cherish those who are terminally ill, the elderly and vulnerable persons, and who, where circumstances permit, choose to offer round-the-clock care in their own homes. The love shown by relatives when they accompany these people in hardship, even in hospitals, is a most beautiful gesture of humanity.

We appeal to our Maltese and Gozitan brothers and sisters to nurture and increase these works of mercy and to continue to strive so that no person in our country will be forsaken in his or her illness or chronic condition.

We place our earnest message in the hands of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven, as we ask her to continue to protect our beloved people with her merciful gaze whilst always showing us Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

We impart on you our pastoral blessing.

Today, 6 August 2016, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

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