



Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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The Feast of All Souls, November 2, 2022

Dear People of God,

November begins with the feasts of All Saints and All Souls. As the light grows dim and the skies darken with winter storms, blowing leaves to the earth from which they came, this holy day puts before us sparks of light in the midst of darkness.

The saints are heroes of light and hope for every age. Their lives were marked by trust and hope in God. In one way or another, they were exemplars of hope, announcing by their works the God of love and mercy, revealed in the Creator's son, Jesus Christ. They most often gave their lives to the weak and wounded, to the vulnerable and marginal, seeking to liberate humanity from all afflictions, especially sin and death. Indeed, saints are the women and men of every time and age who see with the eyes of the Creator and act with the compassion of Jesus, always open to the Holy Spirit to guide and enlighten.

During this month, we pray that the light of the example of the saints may help us to truly see our neighbour, and that we ourselves may be light for our neighbour's feet on the pilgrimage of life. Our faith invites us to consider deeply Christ's response to the question: "*who is my neighbour?*" (Lk 10:29) How will I be a neighbour to the vulnerable and those abandoned by the side of the road?

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) gives us a model for our response to the suffering and pain of body, mind, and soul. In the parable, a man fell into the hands of bandits, was robbed and beaten, and left for dead. We too know people who have fallen into sickness and trauma, which robs them of health and well-being and leaves them at the side of the road of life, experiencing loss and feeling half-dead. Ill health represents a real suffering, a trauma of body, mind and soul.

The Samaritan's response to come alongside, to alleviate suffering, and to invest his own resources to treat the wounds and accompany his neighbour, is in sharp contrast to those who are indifferent or too busy with their lives or concerns of ritual purity. The Samaritan, not knowing whether the half-dead man would survive or die from his wounds, responded with compassion, with the "first aid" of oil and wine, and by transporting the man to the inn for more intensive and long-term care.

One could say this parable is about a continuum of care, which required an expenditure of time, talent and treasure on the part of the Samaritan. The Good Samaritan represents the highest human response to people who are robbed of health and strength: applying our resources to rescue the broken and ill from abandonment on the side of the road. The Catholic faith continues to clearly and unequivocally promote the best possible continuum of health care to those who experience being robbed of good health.

It is notable for our particular time that the Samaritan did not offer to alleviate the suffering of the nearly-dead robbed person with euthanasia ("medical assistance in dying", or MAID). The teaching of the Ten Commandments is clear and unequivocal: "Thou shalt not kill". Our faith continues to clearly and unequivocally reject euthanasia (MAID) and assisted suicide as a response to pain and suffering of body, mind, and soul.



The Samaritan came close to the robbed person. He leaned in and attended to the one who was robbed of health and strength. This is the obviously human response to suffering and pain, and to the existential suffering of individuals whose sense of loss of control or the feeling of being a burden to family and friends creates an anguish of soul. Leaving a person abandoned by the side of the road of existence when robbed of health and strength is never the choice of a good neighbour or a just and caring civil society.

The ideology of euthanasia (MAID) is understandable on many levels in contemporary society, as the experience of loss and abandonment is a powerful force of fear and anxiety. We cannot judge the level of fear and anguish in a person's heart who chooses euthanasia (MAID). However, we can say unequivocally to the faithful Catholic people of God that choosing euthanasia (MAID) is never a choice that is the will of the Creator, as revealed in the sacred texts of divine revelation, the Word of God, and the constant teaching of the Catholic and Apostolic faith.

The end of life and the burden of advancing age with the resulting diminishment of mind and body can be a fearful horizon. Christ himself in His agony on the cross cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mt 27:46). Despite the great advances in health care technologies and the commitment of a just society to do good and avoid harm, we will all experience real crosses. Yet our faith holds to the path of Christ, to be baptized into His death, so as to share in His resurrection from the dead to eternal life. The light overcomes the darkness; engagement and love like that of the saints makes a difference.

Let us use this month of November as a holy time to consider the state of our souls and our relationship with God, and our preparedness for our own health care needs and for our death itself.

- 1) Be reconciled with God, family and friends.
- 2) Have a current health care representative agreement in place (eg, <https://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2020/MyVoice-AdvanceCarePlanningGuide.pdf>). It is important to name a person in this document, a family member or a trusted friend – a Good Samaritan – who knows our wishes and will act consistently with the health care ethics of the Catholic faith (eg, https://www.chac.ca/documents/422/Health_Ethics_Guide_2013.pdf).
- 3) Choose a trusted person to make financial and legal decisions on your behalf should you become incapable, and grant this person an enduring power of attorney.
- 4) Have a last will and testament, and be clear about your wishes regarding your funeral and the pastoral care of your remains (<https://www.rcdvictoria.org/funerals-and-burials>), and the spiritual consolation of your family and friends.

This month offers a real invitation to be renewed in faith and trust in our Creator. "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father*" (Mt 10:29). Jesus is among us as friend and brother on the road of life. Jesus is among us as savior and Lord of life and death. Jesus is our light in times of darkness. Jesus is the Way, giving hope for the pilgrim journey. Jesus is the Truth, giving meaning to our existence. Jesus is the Life, for our lives now and forever.

Entrusting ourselves to Mary our mother, we say in all trust: "*Pray for us now and at the hour of our death*". Amen.

In Communion,

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria