



Ask, Father James:

If one chooses Assisted Death, are their souls condemned?

By this question I understand that you mean patients who chose Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) (a palatable euphemism for euthanasia), that the Federal Government adopted and later legalized in June of 2017. To date, the report on end-of-life decision-making in Canada, produced by an international expert panel and commissioned by the Royal Society of Canada reported that over 4000 Canadians have died by “Medical Aid in Dying” “MAiD.”

We Catholics believe that Medical assisted death or “medicalized death” is a usurpation of God’s authority over life. It is a violation of the 5th commandment, thou shall not kill - which means one is not permitted to kill oneself or kill another person. MAiD is also a violation of the right to life. According to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, “God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim from himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being” (Donum Vitae, V, 1987: 9).

The reason why our church is against MAiD is because of the process of administering assisted death. The first steps includes withholding of potentially life-sustaining treatment, withdrawal of potentially life-sustaining treatment under the guise of carrying out the patient’s Advance directives. The Catholic Church in Canada is concerned about reports that patients are being euthanized within 2-3 days from their request of MAID instead of the mandatory 10 day wait period before implementation in case the patient changes their mind and the requirement that patients must be mentally capable both when they apply for MAID and immediately before it is administered.

What the Catholic church teaches in the event of an incurable disease is to consider Palliative care first. It is an all-encompassing caring for patients who are no longer responsive to curative treatment to help them die well and care for them as they are dying. The official Catholic Church doctrine on palliative care supports increasing pain medication and discontinuing life-sustaining treatments or the termination of treatment in a variety of end-of-life situations. According to the Catechism (1994:2278–79): “Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.” The primary purpose of palliative care is to provide the best quality of life for the patient, while controlling the symptoms of the disease. Palliative hospice philosophy is to make terminal patients as comfortable as possible, while neither hastening nor postponing death.

Medicine is a “helping profession” and obviously, its task is to help patients live not to die. Many Catholic doctors are weighed down in conscience when they are forced to participate in ending someone else’s life, so are some family members who are the care-givers. Pope John Paul II made the following remark to advise such family members who must make life and death decisions regarding a loved one in a “vegetative state,”:

I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food, even when provided by artificial means, always represents a natural means of preserving life, not a medical act. Its use, furthermore, should be considered, in principle, ordinary and proportionate, and as such morally obligatory, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering (March of 2004 address to the participants of a Roman academic conference on life-sustaining treatments and the so-called “vegetative state).

On whether the souls of those who chose MAiD are damned; we leave that judgement in the merciful hands of God. However, St. Thomas Aquinas holds that a person can be held responsible for not doing something to save their lives (see ST 1-2). What is lost when we normalize euthanasia is too great a price to pay: reverence for the sanctity of human life, finding meaning in mysteries of suffering and death, true selfless compassion, and opportunities to heal old family wounds.

Please email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins

Our Lady of Peace Parish



425 Broad Street North
Regina, SK S4R 2X8



306.543.5355



frjowolagba@gmail.com



www.ourladyofpeaceregina.com



