

**The “Red Mass”**  
**Opening of the Legal Year in the State of Victoria**  
**Tuesday January 29th, 2019,**  
**St Patrick’s Cathedral, Melbourne**

**Homily**

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**Victoria – the Euthanasia State**

Once again, God has gathered us at the altar of this magnificent cathedral to offer the annual Mass of the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the legal year. We invoke the Holy Spirit who, as we affirm in the creed, is the “Lord and giver of life”. We pray for all the men and women in this State who serve in the noble professions of the Law. After Mass and some conviviality, the clergy will return to their places of ministry, and you, my brothers and sisters of the Law, will return to your chambers, offices, courts and cubbyholes, and for all of us it will be “business as usual”. But will it be business as usual in 2019? I think not.

Something is about to change, something that, in many different ways, will affect all of us. A line is about to be crossed, a line wisely and severely marked out across the centuries by the Judeo-Christian ethic, a line defined and protected by the Law and specific laws you administer. In the middle of this year, the state-sanctioned killing of human beings will be reintroduced. The familiar slogan on car number plates, “Victoria the education state” may well become *Victoria the euthanasia state*.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the “Lord and giver of life”, our Church has clear teachings on life and death, on the right to life that rests on a Christian understanding of the unique nature and dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of a personal God. Each of us is a living self-aware being, gifted by God who is the Source of all life. And this is directed by the commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, which expresses a dimension of the Natural Law.

The beautiful truth about life itself was expounded by Saint John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of Life. Here he affirmed the good news of a “culture of life and love” as against the “culture of death” that is steadily taking control in these times.

Paragraphs 2276 and 2277, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* spell it out in unequivocal terms, but in an interesting Christian way, that is, by first affirming compassion: “Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.”

Then follows paragraph 2277, “Whatever its motives or means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons. It is

morally unacceptable.” Euthanasia is then bluntly described as “a murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.” The following paragraphs 2278 and 2279 outline the best practice in difficult cases with praise of palliative care as a “special form of disinterested charity”.

This is a current issue. Twelve months ago, in Rome, Pope Francis addressed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith who were meeting to examine how the Church handles issues when accompanying terminally ill patients. He firmly ruled out euthanasia as an “ideological affirmation of man’s will to power over life” and he affirmed the need for a Church that offers hope to those who suffer. Our role is pastoral, compassionate, palliative in the deepest sense of mercy.

Not long ago I ministered to a priest dying of cancer. My friend told me how, through pain, he had become more sympathetic to terminally ill patients so he helped me to understand why depressed people who suffer are tempted to choose suicide. But I also marveled at the loving and expert palliative care he received at Caritas Christi hospice. That is why I am skeptical in face of the arguments we heard based on some hard cases, and we all know that sound law is never based on the hard cases.

Earlier I affirmed that state-sanctioned killing will be *reintroduced* this year. In accordance with the Law, we had state-sanctioned killing in the form of capital punishment, until this was abolished in 1975. In 1962, I was one of the thousands of university students who marched in the streets against capital punishment at the time of the tragic Tait Case, which a few of you will remember.

But is not euthanasia different? This is death by choice and so many safeguards will be in place. Yet it remains state-sanctioned killing however nicely you dress it up. So some will say that this is now the Law and we just have to accept it. Legal positivism rears its totalitarian head. But hiding in a legalist cubby hole will not always be easy. Some of you inevitably will be involved in cases involving families, consent, property, pressure, medical science, responsibility, awareness etc.

Let us also think of our friends in the medical professions who will be compromised by this legislation. It is also likely that some of you will be called to support them in cases that will inevitably arise when they exercise conscience or become involved in family disputes.

Hiding behind the weasel words “assisted suicide”, the culture of death creeps forward, as those who masterminded this coup in social engineering know so well. A refined and regulated system was introduced in the Netherlands but now there are varied estimates of the growing number of deaths by way of euthanasia, at least 5000 a year. In Belgium it extends to children. What Archbishop Anthony Fisher recently described as “bracket creep” is at work, as the safeguards fall down one by one because, as he put it, “Once we start deciding that death is in the best interests of people, then of course there’ll be others in the line”.

In his address in January 2018, Pope Francis also affirmed that the growing demand for euthanasia in many countries is part of secularization, “by rendering absolute the concepts of self-determination and autonomy”. In the fields where we serve we will hear more of this buzz-word “autonomy”, the ultra-individualism pushed by the

libertarians. All the Popes of our times have denounced extreme individualism as sheer selfishness.

There is no place for autonomy in the Judeo-Christian ethic, which is profoundly *social*, based on the reality that none of us is an island, that we relate to one another, that what we do affects others and vice-versa. In the practice of the Law you see that phenomenon every day. I wonder whether the very concept of justice is possible in an atomized society of absolutely autonomous beings, but here we venture into the bizarre world of post-modern ideology, poisonous nonsense that drives much social engineering today.

Self-determination and autonomy open a chilling paradox. I know how many of you here today have worked against the scourge of youth suicide, and that is a noble cause, indeed an urgent cause. But in this State after July 2019, once you turn 18 you could, in dire circumstances, apply for medical assistance to kill yourself. A most amazing paradox....

So what would your patron Saint Thomas More think of it all? In 1516 he published a mysterious book called *Utopia* apparently describing an imaginary ideal society. But the Greek word “utopia” just means “nowhere”. Voluntary assisted suicide is accepted and regulated in Utopia. More was not saying that this is good. His book is a clever and complex satire on the impossibility of a perfect society and the hypocrisy of society in his own times. For example, a basic element in utopian society is slavery, which linked to human trafficking, has rightly reemerged as a major issue in our times and in this regard I commend the work of the former ambassador to the Holy See, John Mc Carthy, QC. But in Utopia the lawyers have also been abolished, a touch of the ironic humor of the great English lawyer, saint and martyr. What an amazing man Saint Thomas More was, certainly not that whining bigot depicted in the mendacious television series *Wolf Hall*.

I regret that my homily has been on a dour theme. I could have given you one of those nice condescending pats on the head at which the clergy are so skilled. But we too have had to face an end to the “business as usual” mentality, thanks to a royal commission and imminent events in Rome.

Brothers and sisters, in facing challenging realities in rapidly changing times, bring your faith and your reason together. Do what you can where you are. But also ask the Holy Spirit for courage, for some of that spirit of resistance and honesty that characterized the Bishop of Munster, Blessed Clemens Von Galen. He stood up to Hitler in naming and opposing the T4 Euthanasia Program that haunts even the most sanitized and refined killing projects of our times.

Now, as once again we enter the mysteries of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, let us give ourselves to the Divine Father, source of all life, to Jesus Christ his Son, who brings us the new life of grace and to the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. To this One God, the Most Holy Trinity, be all glory and honour, for ever and ever. Amen.

