



## **Pastoral Care of Those Seeking Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (also known as Medical Assistance in Dying)**

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In 2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a letter, *Samaritanus bonus*, on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life. It noted that euthanasia is a crime against human life because, in this act, one chooses directly to cause the death of another innocent human being and in giving assistance in suicide, one contributes to the death of another. While requests for euthanasia and assisted suicide may rise from anguish and despair, these acts of killing must always be rejected. Such actions are never a real service to the patient.

The factors that largely determine requests for euthanasia and assisted suicide are unmanaged pain, and the loss of human and theological hope, provoked by the often inadequate psychological and spiritual human assistance provided by those who care for the sick. These factors are almost always a case of an anguished plea for help and love. The response must include care needs, pain relief, and affective and spiritual needs, all of which are included in palliative care.

Helping the Christian to experience this moment of death with spiritual assistance is a supreme act of charity. The Church is called to accompany spiritually the faithful in all situations, offering them the “healing resources” of prayer and the sacraments. This involves an ongoing relationship of care and compassion for the patient as well as the family.

“The pastoral accompaniment of those who expressly ask for euthanasia or assisted suicide today presents a singular moment when a reaffirmation of the teaching of the Church is necessary. With respect to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the confessor must be assured of the presence of the true contrition necessary for the validity of absolution which consists in ‘sorrow of mind and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning for the future’. In this situation, we find ourselves before a person who, whatever their subjective dispositions may be, has decided upon a gravely immoral act and willingly persists in this decision. Such a state involves a manifest absence of the proper disposition for the reception of the Sacraments of Penance, with absolution, and Anointing, with Viaticum. Such a penitent can receive these sacraments only when the minister discerns his or her readiness to take concrete steps that indicate he or she has modified their decision in this regard” (*Samaritanus bonus*, V. 11).

While the person may not receive the Sacraments of Penance, with absolution, and Anointing, with Viaticum, the person may receive a funeral service consisting of a Liturgy of the Word and the person may be buried in the cemetery. Ongoing pastoral care for the family is very important.

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