Homily, 24 April 2016
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 13:26-33; Psalms 145:8-9,10-11,12-13; Revelations 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a,34-35

“I give you a new commandment: love one another.
As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”

Love is not simply a feeling or a sentiment. It is not passive. Love engages us body and soul. It forces us to act.

Love benefits and helps others. It is ever ready to be of assistance, to seek justice, to perform works of mercy: caring for the sick, comforting the sorrowful.

Love also helps us in the moral life: “Love does not rejoice over wrongdoing,” wrote St. Paul, “but rejoices in the truth.”

But love can be misdirected. Our conscience should guide our love. But when our conscience is in error, love can be deceived. What love considers good can sometimes be an evil.

Recently the Legislature considered a bill on assisted suicide, which was euphemistically called “The Patient Choice at the End of Life Act.” Fortunately, the bill did not advance to final consideration and it died.

The stated purpose of the act was to allow a dying person to choose the manner of his death and avoid pointless, needless pain – useless agony – and the loss of personal dignity.

For too many people, hastening death seems to be the most compassionate way to help someone who is suffering a terminal illness. It seems to be what love demands.

For those who advocate assisted suicide and euthanasia, the act of ‘eliminating suffering’ by ‘eliminating the sufferer’ is seen a virtue rather than a vice.

Unfortunately this approach to suffering has become legal and accepted in several countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Canada.
In our country it’s legal in Oregon, Washington, Vermont, Montana, New Mexico and California. Last year 25 states considered some kind of assisted suicide legislation. This year the movement came to Nebraska.

*Love rejoices in the Truth.*

Unfortunately, the death with dignity movement rests on a lie: that the pain often associated with terminal illness is untreatable. There is another falsehood that is often given along with the first. It’s that the amount of pain medication required to treat this pain hastens death.

Modern end-of-life care is very good. Now days, pain medication may be administered by the dying person himself. He has control.

It’s been noted that patients who are allowed to self-administer their pain medication often use less than those who medication is administered by others.

Perhaps just being in control reduces anxiety and lessens pain. It is very rare that someone's pain can't be controlled.

Other studies have found that those with poorly treated pain die sooner than those whose pain is properly controlled. Pain kills, not pain medication.

Several studies have explored why terminally ill people choose suicide. Pain is not the first reason. Pain is not the second reason. It is not the third reason. It is not the fourth reason. It is not the fifth reason.

Pain is not among the top five reasons why people choose suicide or euthanasia at the end of life … *that is the truth.*

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We live in a culture today that values individuality and independence. It exalts self-determination. Productivity is a virtue.

People who are dying, people who are profoundly disabled, people with severe mental illnesses, and very elderly people do not measure up well in our culture. They are a burden, they consume resources, they don’t contribute. “*Why would they want to live?*” seems to be the unspoken question.
So the reasons people give for wanting to die are not surprising: my life has no meaning now, I don't want to be a burden, I am afraid of my illness, I am poor and have no insurance, I am lonely.

I think the truth is that the *Death with Dignity* movement is giving birth to the new eugenics movement. It has already begun in Europe.

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So how should we respond to this new attitude? We need to do what love demands: we need to care for the sick, comfort the sorrowing, counsel the doubtful. We must show solidarity and communion with those who suffer.

We can begin by remembering two truths:

- First, that every person is created in the image of God, which gives each person an inherent dignity and value.
- Second, that God alone is the Lord of Life from its beginning until its end: no one can claim the right to destroy an innocent human being, not even himself.

Care for the dying is our responsibility. We need to become familiar with modern of end-of-life care so that we can discuss it with others and dispel the myths and falsehoods that darken hearts and corrupt the conscience. We need to insist on good end-of-life care for those we love.

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I'd like to end with a quote from the Pope's latest exhortation on *Love in the Family*. Although it is about marriage, what the Pope says applies to our attitude toward those who are a burden to society. It is an appeal for developing a good conscience.

He says: *Love is Patient* ...

*Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they act or think, or if they are not everything I want them to be. Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like.*
Please, tell everyone you can, but especially your state legislator and other representatives, that the suffering of the dying is not to be treated with death.

The dying person also has a right to live in this world, just as he is, for the time that remains to him or to her. Love, not death, is the proper response to suffering.