

**Homily regarding the Assisted Suicide initiative
Deacon Juan Lezcano © 2008**

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God's word has extraordinary power, and if we listen to it, pray about it, and reflect on it, perhaps we'll get some of the same confidence, that same awareness, that God's word is not empty. The word of the Lord is so powerful and potent, the seed so strong and good, that out of practically nothing, goodness, mercy, justice and peace can grow!

It is with that confidence, that awareness, that I want to speak to you about something very controversial – the assisted suicide initiative proposed for the November ballot in Washington. The assisted suicide initiative sounds so reasonable, so humane, so kind. That is its seduction. In truth, the assisted suicide initiative is utterly contrary to our Christian belief on life, the source of life, and the worth of life. We are not talking about the relieving of pain. We are not talking about refraining from going to extraordinary measures to prolong existence. We are talking about helping someone take his or her life. The viewpoint behind the assisted suicide initiative is one of autonomy: I am in control; not God but I am the one who is in charge of my life. The viewpoint behind the assisted suicide initiative is a utilitarian view of life: a life only has worth if it has an obviously useful purpose. If not, that life is not necessary, perhaps not even worth living.

On the contrary, we Christians believe that every life has value because we were created by God. Human lives, in all their complexity and frailty, have a worth that is rooted in us as human beings, part of our very being: that worth can never be lost, a worth that comes from beyond us by our creation as a gift at the hand of God. A worth not based on our perceived utility or any obvious usefulness, but instead a worth based on the fact that our existence, our life, meant so much to God that he made us in his own image.

Christian faith refuses to allow suffering, or the fear of suffering, or the avoidance of suffering, or our own desire for autonomy to become the Lord of our lives, to become the regulator and determiner of whether a life is worth living. Yes, our Christian faith says, suffering is an evil and a trial; yet “suffering, while still an evil and a trial in itself, can always become a source of good.” Those words were written by Pope John Paul II, whose own suffering and weakness and dying, in all their transparency and openness on international television, were a window into the vibrant worth that life can always have, even in weakness, as we care for those who suffer and die, and as the suffering and dying care for us and give us their gifts.

In the weeks and months leading to the November elections the Washington State Catholic Conference which represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State will be asking for our help to defeat Initiative 1000, which legalizes physician-assisted suicide. The Catholic Church in Washington helped defeat a similar initiative in 1991, and with your help, we can do it again. Please watch the bulletin for opportunities to get involved.

We must begin today, as though the seed is just now sown. Just because there was a good crop in 1991 doesn't mean that it necessarily will happen again. The parable makes us attentive to history today, to here and now, to the invitation and the Spirit who is trying to invade our lives.

I'm confident that what Isaiah said, what Paul said, what Jesus said, is true! God has sent the word among us and that word tells us how to change this world so that it will not be a place where evil has the upper hand. That it will change it so that it will be a world where the dignity of every human being is upheld. That will only happen, however, when you and I truly listen to God's word and then act upon it.