

# Into Your Hands Lord:



*A Catholic Companion to  
Dying and Hospice Care*

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## Dedicated to:

My grandparents:

Dula Budde,

Eddie & Marie (Kilburg) Schmidt.

A day does not go by that I do not think of you.

Your devotion to Holy Mother Church  
enriched my life and brought me closer to God  
by allowing me to be raised and nurtured  
within Her fold, led by your witness.

*+ Eternal rest grant unto them, O, Lord.*

*And let perpetual light shine upon them.*



Nihil Obstat:

Rev. Richard L. Schaefer

Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur:

Most Rev. Jerome Hanus, O.S.B.

Apostolic Administrator, Dubuque Archdiocese

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## Introduction

*The following book is a companion, a helpful aid in the journey towards death and into new life. It is a book for those who are dying, their families, friends, chaplains, ministers, or anyone interested in preparing themselves for their eventual end on this Earth. I humbly submit this book in hopes of helping others as they journey along a difficult path. This book may not be for everyone, but I hope it may help at least some. In no way do I consider this a definitive text on the subject.*

*How could it be? I simply offer it in the hope that it bring comfort in a time of trial, a spiritual drink amidst the blazing heat of the desert.*

**My God, My God!**

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

These are the words of Christ as he hung upon the tree

Some say it is not for us to ask "Why?"

But what about my Lord who did as he gazed up to the sky?

Seek and you will find, knock and the door shall open

This promise, offered for dark times, by our savior it was  
spoken

Christ, upon the cross, beckons us to ask "Why?"

He died for our sake, so the answer may surprise

When we dare to ask our Father what is in his plan

He is there to welcome us with a loving, open hand

"Why?" my child, you ask?

I shall tell you now of what has come to pass

Each day I am with you. Each night I'm by your side.

I am here to answer your heartache, all I ask is that you  
give up your pride

You are not in control, hand it over to me



## Into Your Hands Lord

If you want to know the answers, you need to set your  
worries free

I love all my children, you, especially so

I love you, my child, more than you know

Your pleading and crying falls heavy upon my ears

My only Son suffered like you, I, too, have faced your fears

Come to me, I welcome you with open arms

And sit in my presence where I shall protect you from  
harm

And when darkness around you falls, and the situation  
seems bleak

Know that my love for you and yours is always near, all you  
need to do is trust me when I speak





**“It is finished.”**

(John 19:30)

The shock of a terminal diagnosis or severe injury can cause us great sorrow. “My life is over!” may be the reaction you had when the words from the doctor were first heard. Perhaps you were overcome with numbness or even denial. It is not easy to understand and accept such an overwhelming reality. There are many theories and guides that exist to help you and your loved ones through this time. This companion seeks to help provide a means by which Catholics may approach death in full-communication with Holy Mother Church and in union with our Savior who has gone before us. Though your time on Earth is limited, you still have life within you and you still have a calling from God.

We look continuously to Christ as our example throughout this journey. So, how do we approach our own death the way he did? Is our life truly over? What more do I have to live for? Why doesn't God just take me now and get it over with? These are hard questions; each may be answered in a different way for each person. Let us consider our Savior's trial and his heroic acceptance of being condemned to death.

As Christ stood before the crowd and was condemned to death by Pilate, he knew that his time was short, and yet, he continued to minister to those

around him. He was still alive, and therefore, he still had a ministry to carry out among the people.

During the final hours of his life Christ reached out to others to teach and comfort; to be present to them. He calls out to the women “Do not weep for me” (Luke 23:28). He offers his mother to the Church which he established: “‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother’” (John 19:26-27). Even at the moment of death, as he hung upon the cross, his hands pierced by the centurion’s nails, flesh torn by the lash, and face soaked in others’ spit, he offered consolation to those nearest him, including the man who hung upon the cross next to him. Think about that for a moment. The Son of Man was living through the most excruciating pain and indignity one could imagine, and he remained present to those around him.

The man next to him on the cross, a sinner, a guilty man, pleaded with Jesus to allow him to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Did Christ ignore him and focus on his own pain? Did Christ reject him for his previous failings? No. Christ, in a most profound way offered that man, suffering himself, consolation and hope (Luke 23:43). Even though he faced his own painful death, he knew he was not yet dead and so he knew his Father had a purpose for him.

There may be days when you or your loved one find yourselves wondering why God would allow you to remain in the state you are in: why he does not just take you into paradise immediately? There is not an easy answer to such wondering, but if we look to the Son of Man and how he spent his final hours, we may find some guidance in our quest for answers. If you are still living, you have meaning and a purpose. You were created out of love, for love, by the Author of Love. You are not an accident. God holds you in his thoughts each and every moment.

If we are still here, he has a plan for us. It is our task to offer ourselves in prayer and humility to seek out why we remain even as our bodies seem to fail us. Perhaps you are still here to pray for your loved ones: for those who have fallen away from God and His Church; for those who have been hurt by others, so that they may forgive their transgressors; for those who will die alone, that they may be comforted by the Angels and the Saints. Perhaps you are still here to be a witness to others on how to die a holy death, much like the way our Savior did. Maybe you are still here because God is waiting for your own conversion of heart towards Him. For each and every person, there is a unique reason why you remain alive. When you have fulfilled that vocation, God will call you unto Himself, away from this temporal life.

We must also remember that Christ died, but that his final words were not “It is finished” (John 19:30). No, this is not the end of the story, for though he died, he also rose on the third day. Because of this, we are all offered the beautiful gift of joining him in the resurrection. And so, even when our life here on Earth is over, it is not the end. It is only the end of this temporal life, and the beginning of our eternal reward. We, like the thief upon the cross next to Christ, are offered the hope of going to our eternal reward in heaven.

### **Let us pray:**

Almighty Creator,

You who made me, who knit me in my mother’s womb, you hold me in your love each and every moment of my life, you have a calling in store for me, though I do not always know or understand what it may be. Help me to know my vocational calling even as I approach my end here on Earth. Help me to see what you desire of me, and give the grace and the strength to fulfill your will. I desire to please you, my Lord. Guide me in my journey as I earnestly work to live in union with your will.

Amen.







# Silence

In the modern world, we have grown unaccustomed to silence. We are surrounded by noise; we are consumed with action and activity. It is understandable that, in what appears to be dark times, the diagnosis of a terminal illness, the slow deterioration of one's health in one's later years, the silence is uncomfortable, perhaps even scary. This can be the case for both the dying as well as for loved ones gathered together in support and community of those who are dying. In the midst of the trials and suffering of Job, his friends show up to offer him comfort and consolation. We read:

Then they sat down upon the ground with him seven days and seven nights, but none of them spoke a word to him; for they saw how great was his suffering (Job 2:13).

They said nothing. And how could they? Nothing they could say could heal Job, or bring him any true relief. What they did do for Job was offer their presence, their willingness to join with him in his suffering and be uncomfortable with him in the silence. This lasts for seven days and nights, and the silence seems to be too much. Job's friends begin to speak, and it seems as though their words do not bring him any greater comfort. Perhaps we can gain

some insight from Job and his friends regarding the challenge you are facing with your loved ones. There will be times when the right words do not seem to come to our own mouths. The “right” questions may seem to elude us. This is common, and it is okay.

In the coming months, weeks, days, or even moments, there may be many moments of silence. Some of those moments may last what seem to be an eternity, perhaps becoming unbearable to handle alone. These moments can be sources of great frustration, pain, and anguish. They can be filled with doubt. One may ask oneself “What if?” “Why is this happening?” “Where is God?” Such questions are important to ponder. It is in the silence that we have the opportunity to gain insight into a reality bigger than ourselves. These moments can be beautiful opportunities to listen to the voice of God to guide you and your loved ones along the journey you are traveling together.

Let us pause and reflect for a moment on a few excerpts from scripture to help us consider how we may approach these moments of silence so that we may gain from them the graces God intends for us. Read the following scripture verses and then continue on to the reflection that follows.

**Read: Luke 1:26-38**

**1 Kings 19:9-13**

## **Reflection:**

Listen to the silence.

Alone in the darkness in her humble residence, a young woman trembled in fear at the sight of the messenger's approach.

Alone in the darkness of a cave, a man cried out in desperation and despair to his Maker to bring an end to his life, to cease the tribulation that was given him.

In the silence of those dark nights the message of God resounded in their souls. In the silent darkness of night, God embraced those two souls, and spoke to them as His beloved.

Do we take time to listen to the silence? When the wind howls and fires rage, when darkness envelopes us, when we are beset by the trials of life, broken promises, deplorable deception, hatred, greed, arrogance, selfishness, cruelty, and attacks on our very dignity, our very personhood, to whom do we listen?

We must listen to the silence.

Gabriel appeared to Mary with gentleness and compassion on that silent night. “Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28) proclaimed the angel of the Lord. And the young woman cast aside her fears and trepidations, silenced the “What ifs?” churning about in her mind, and handed herself over to the will of her Creator, courageously declaring throughout time, “Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord. Let it be done according to thy word!”

Can we do likewise?

The man on the mountain sought God’s response to his despair. He desired to hear God’s voice, to be comforted, guided, affirmed in his mission. He required of God to leave no doubt that the response was from the one who Created heaven and Earth, who divided the land from the seas, who raised valleys and fell mountains; such a God must certainly come to him in all of the splendor and magnificence proper to His nature so that he might be convinced. And so he sought Him in the torrent of the wind, in the blazing fire, in the shuttering earthquake. But He was not in any of them. The world drowns out God, distracts us from Him who knows that which will fulfill us. God knows that we will think Him just more noise, more distractions, more empty promises if He presents himself to us in the form of the very things that

distract us from Him. And so, God came to Elijah in the way that was most personal, most loving and compassionate. His breath descended upon the heart of His prophet, and He spoke to His child in a whisper, leaning close to His beloved creation. The sweet breath of the Creator upon the ear of His adopted son overwhelmed Elijah and humbled him to recognize that he was truly in the presence of the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Father of all.

Listen in the silence.

Unite yourself with the proclamation of our blessed Mother on that dark and lonely night: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord!" (Luke 1:38). Make that declaration your own! Take heed of Elijah's mistake of seeking God in places of deception and noise. Seek God in the seclusion of the mountain cave, in the simplicity of a peaceful home. Open yourself to the silence that God beckons us all to enter into so that we may hear Him speak to our hearts. Banish your fears from entering into that silence, bar the entrance of your heart and mind to the "What ifs?" and "unknowns" that divert you from your Maker's voice, wade out into the deep of the pain and suffering from your past that still haunts your daily worries and anxieties. God knows them all and seeks to help you find the path out of that bitter and barren desert.

Spend time in silence with Him; hear Him speak to the very depths of your being; allow Him to water the seeds of passion and courage lying dormant in your soul so that you may choose to move forward with fervor and zeal according to His will, uniting your will with His, and trusting that He will lead you to happiness and freedom in life.

Listen in the silence and know that your God is near.

### **Let us pray:**

Gracious and ever-loving God,

We thank you for these moments of silence. Though they may be difficult to accept right now, give us the grace to take this gift of silence you have offered me/us so that we may seek your will in the midst of the suffering and mourning I/we face this day. Though I may not be strong enough to always accept these moments of silence as a gift, or as something to be cherished, I ask that you help me gain from them what you will, so that I/we may find comfort in them and prepare ourselves for the journey from death to life that I/we face.

In your name we pray. Amen.







Rejoice!

It may sound odd or even insensitive to say that this is a time for rejoicing, but that is exactly what the preparation for death into new life is for believers.

**Read: Matthew 21:1-11**

Matthew's Gospel introduces the last week of Christ's life with celebration. If we did not know what happens to Jesus following his death on the cross this story would very much seem ironic or even vicious. The author, Matthew, sets up the reader for a shock by describing the Savior's arrival at the Holy city with crowds celebrating him only for him to be betrayed by the same crowd less than a week later. This story would seem even more vicious if it ended at the foot of the cross, when the Son of Man cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

We know, however, that the story does not end there. It continues with the resurrection of Jesus. The tomb is empty, Christ is Risen! Even more profound is the reality that this story is true. And because of that, we have great cause to celebrate Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. It ought to be anything but gloomy or depressing. We offer remembrance of this event every Passion Sunday with the blessing of the palms. The Son of Man's own journey towards death was not solely a time of grief but a time of celebration, rejoicing, and preparation. Should it be any other way

for Christ's followers? We who believe in the resurrection, who have hope in our own salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, have much to celebrate!

Just as finding peace in the silence can be a great challenge in the midst of our own journey towards death and to new life, finding moments of rejoicing, of laughter, of celebration in that journey can also be riddled with difficulties and at times may seem impossible. However, we who have faith in the resurrection have reason to celebrate. Saint Augustine proclaimed "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!" Let us rejoice in the resurrection and rejoice in the life that we have shared with others just as the crowd celebrated the life of Christ in the midst of his own preparation for death on the cross.

The obvious question is, "How can we do this?" It may not always be easy, but here are some suggestions for things to consider doing in this time of preparation.

1. Tell stories of past days, of past loved ones, friends, of holidays and birthdays.
2. Laugh. Do not be afraid to laugh. It can sometimes feel almost disrespectful to find humor and joy while our loved one is dying, or,

while you are facing a terminal diagnosis for yourself. Again, let us look to the saints for guidance. Saint Lawrence, while being grilled alive as punishment for refusing to renounce his Christian faith, cleverly announced: “Turn me over, I’m done on this side!” Like Saint Lawrence, do not lose your humor simply because death draws near.

3. Continue to celebrate milestones: birthdays, baptisms, anniversaries, graduations, and other monumental moments in peoples’ lives. You are not dead yet, so continue to live!
4. Enjoy the little things. My grandma, even when she was sick, would eat her dessert first. When asked why she did this, since it was always considered proper to leave dessert for last, she would reply with a chuckle “I want to eat my dessert first because I don’t know if I will make it through this meal.” Grandma liked dessert, especially angel food cake. She made sure to enjoy it whenever she could and did not lose sight of the little pleasures in life.
5. Take things easy. With the news of declining health or a terminal diagnosis, we can sometimes make decisions very quickly in order to feel more in control of our lives. We

engage in activities like cleaning out the house, rushing the funeral planning, as well as other things; anything to stay active and make decisions, since we have a feeling of the loss of control over our life. This can be the case for those who are facing their own mortality as well as for their loved ones who are traveling on this journey with them. Sometimes families want to try to have everything “wrapped up” while their loved one is still alive so that when they pass there is less to be concerned about. Don’t rush things that are not vitally important to be completed immediately. Remember to take time for silence and to make decisions in a way that allows you to absorb and reflect on the whole experience of what is happening in your life. Obviously, there are times when decisions may need to be made with haste, but for those times when this is not necessary, it may be helpful, and more comforting to all involved, to take a step back, take a breath, and take it easy. Jesus didn’t run to Pilate’s house the minute after he entered the gates of Jerusalem. He took time to prepare for what was to come.

## **Let us pray:**

Christ, our Lord and Savior,

You who began your journey towards death with the jubilant crowd, you who know the darkness of death, I/we come to you this day for assistance and guidance. As death draws near, graciously help me/us to approach it with joy and celebration. Let me/us face the darkness with a smile, with good humor, and with laughter. Through your own life, death, and resurrection, we can find guidance in the journey we are on towards the end of our own mortal life; help me/us to see this daily and to continually reflect upon the fact that you made sure to celebrate, even though you were facing your own death. Thank you, Lord, for the gift you have granted each and every one of us for your sacrifice for our sake.

In your name we pray.

Amen.



## Simon of Cyrene

It is often said that we all have our cross to carry. On his way to Calvary, Christ had the aid of Simon to carry his cross. It is easy to glance over this verse in light of the entire story of the Passion of the Christ, but if we do we are missing a profound example by the Lord to help us see how to approach our own mortality at the end of life.

**Read: Luke 23:26**

There is a cultural tradition (especially within the United States) for us to cherish independence. We are often told that we should be able to do things for ourselves and that it is considered weakness to ask for the assistance of others, even in times of need. In truth, this cannot be further from reality. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, in the moments before death, accepted the aid of Simon to carry his cross, to give him relief from the burden of his cross. Are we willing to be like Christ when we face our own death; when illness takes away our independence, our strength, our ability to do everything for ourselves? It is not shameful for us to accept the assistance of others. Rather, it is recognition of the fact that we have been created in the Divine Image of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is a perfect communion, a perfect relationship between the three Persons of God. If we



are made in this image, then we, too, are a reflection of communion with one another. We were made, not as individuals, solely dependent upon our own merits, but rather, made as persons in relationship with one another and with our Creator. It is an honor for us to accept the aid of others, for in those moments, we can help them find Christ in their service to another. Our pride can get in the way of loving those who seek to aid us on our journey; remember, love is not proud (1 Cor. 13).

Just as profound, we can unite ourselves to the humility of Jesus, who, though he was the Word made flesh, was willing to lower himself so as to accept the aid of a stranger on his way to Calvary. If we wish to exemplify our savior in our own life, we are offered this opportunity as we become less able to do things for ourselves. We can not only share in Christ's passion by humbling ourselves as he did, but we can offer others the opportunity to carry the Cross of Christ who resides in each and every one of us.

For those of us who are in good health, are we willing to be Simon for others? We must remember that Simon was a stranger to Jesus, forced to carry the cross by the Roman soldiers. We may assume that he did so unwillingly at first. When we find ourselves in similar situations, though we may not be strangers to

those we find facing their own Way of the Cross, we are forced to face the death of our loved one against our will. If we could choose otherwise, they would not be dying. If Simon could accept the cross for Christ, are we able to do so for our loved one? It is certainly no easy task. All of the insults, the spit, and the violence that was directed at Jesus fell upon Simon as well. In his walk to Calvary with Jesus, Simon surely suffered greatly. He was so close to Christ that he experienced much of the suffering that Christ faced on the Way of the Cross. The blood that came from the wounds of Jesus that covered the timber upon his shoulders surely covered Simon. Simon suffered the walk to Golgatha with Jesus. His was a different kind of suffering, but we cannot ignore Simon's sacrifice for Christ's sake.

It is the same for those who accept the cross of their loved one and choose to help them carry their burden as they approach death. Those facing death may experience painful feelings of anger, frustration, helplessness, sadness, sorrow, despair, hopelessness, and doubt. These same experiences may also be felt by the loved ones who are companions on the journey from death to new life. It is not an easy thing to ask of another. Imagine yourself standing along with the crowd in Jerusalem as Jesus passed on by, the crowd presses in, and you are forced to the front. Jesus

falters, struggling under the weight of the heavy burden upon his back. You see him struggle, and then you hear a harsh voice shout “You! Carry his cross!” There are many around you. Perhaps if you ignore the order the soldier will choose another. This does not happen. Instead, the soldier comes directly to you and repeats himself: “You! Carry his Cross!” What a task it is to take up the cross of our loved ones in their time of need. It is a burden, but it is a blessed burden.

Looking from the perspective of our faith, after knowing the sacrifice that Christ offered for our sake, for eternal salvation, wouldn't we rush to volunteer to carry his cross? If we could go back in time to that day in Jerusalem, wouldn't we willingly offer our services to him? We have the opportunity to do just that when we offer to help carry the cross of those around us who are facing their own death. Are we willing to take up those crosses?

## **Let us pray:**

For those who are dying:

Lord, as I face my own mortality and my death draws near, I ask for your grace to help me accept the help of others. You humbled yourself on the way to your own death by accepting the aid of Simon. Help me recognize the Simons in my own journey and allow them to help me carry my cross. I know that you are the one who beautifully made them in your image and they are seeking to serve you by serving me. Help me offer them that opportunity to know you more completely, and to know you in a more personal way by allowing them to help me. I thank you for the Simons you send me in my time of need and I am blessed to have them in my life.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, in unity with the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.



Where Is He?  
Why Isn't She Here?

The pain of death can overwhelm even the strongest people. In our darkest moments, when we need our loved ones the most, they can sometimes let us down. They are absent from our presence, often because they simply cannot accept the truth of the situation. Their loved one is dying and they are unable to absorb what they know is approaching. Ignoring the truth, hiding, being away from the scene, allows those who refuse to be present to us, who are not strong enough to be Simon for us, to try to escape the pain of losing their loved one. If you look around you as you prepare for your death and you notice some people missing, you are not alone. Was it not the same for Christ?

**Read: Matthew 26:47-56; 69-74**

### **Reflection:**

They ran. They ran away in fear. Cowering alone somewhere in the dark, hoping not to be found. They did not want to be seen. They did not want to see each other. Seeing the hopelessness in the eyes of the others would only be a reminder of how hopeless it all seemed to oneself. Shielding themselves from the terror of the angry crowd they took refuge in places that were unknown and undisclosed even after the rest of the story was scrawled down on parchment. Dark places, behind doors locked and barricaded. Their surroundings became the portrait of their soul

painted with broad strokes of anger, frustration, sadness, terror and dismay. They did not know what was going to happen, but they knew what they feared would happen, and that fear drove them far from the torture that surely awaited their Lord, their teacher, their friend.

All their vying for prominence in the Heavenly Kingdom ceased when it came time to stand firm. They melted away into the recesses of the city so as to disappear from existence, to be unaccounted for in what seemed to them to be the final and last moments. Even the one whom we call “The Rock” was not resolute enough to withstand the fury of the mob. Their vociferous accusations pounded Peter again and again. This man who was accustomed to the sea and saw firsthand the devastation of waves upon the shoreline was slowly brought to defeat by human waves of anger and the torrent of upheaval. Denying not once but thrice that he knew Christ, admitting thrice that he himself was a nobody; perhaps in his denial of Jesus he became a nobody to himself, unworthy of the distinction of “disciple.”

We have all been let down by such people. Even when we understand why they ran, even if we know that they held out as long as they felt they could, even if we assume we would act in the same way, no consolation

is found. We expect others to be there for us when things get bad. When we look up from our own walk to Calvary and we don't see any familiar faces, we are lost in that moment of rejection. How much we can understand from how Christ felt. Abandoned by everyone, Christ continued on. Crying out to his own Father, our Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

Christ knows the pain of having others run out on him. He understands how we feel when our closest friends and our family members leave us to suffer alone. In that moment that we feel that no one is there for us, that we have been left in darkness to fend for ourselves, to find our own way through, to drudge forward through the muck, we can take notice of the one who understands more fully than anyone else what it is to carry the burdens of life on our shoulders seemingly alone because Christ has done so in a very real way. He bled as we do in those moments. He ached and cried out in despair and pain. He felt that deep and agonizing throbbing of the chest when loved ones take leave of us. When we find ourselves in that place of hopelessness and despair and we cry out from the depths of that pain, we must ask ourselves "Whom do we desire to hear us?" If we wish for someone to understand us, if we are looking for a friend who knows what we are going through, then



cry out to the Christ, the Son of Man, the Lion of Judah, Lamb of God, he who has been there, he who collapsed in the dirt, his blood mixed with the clay in that place of the Skull, without those who claimed they would be there when he needed them. He knows, he understands, and he hears you. He only asks that you reach out for him and take the hand that he has extended. He will pull you up from the cavernous pit of despair you find yourself in, and if he does not pull you out, he will join you in that place, and he will himself show you the way to glory.

## **Let us pray:**

Lord, your own disciples abandoned you. “The Rock” denied you. I am facing my own death, I look around and there are people missing. Please help me understand why they are not here. I need your grace and strength to try to understand their choice to stay away. Help me to find you standing beside me even when I feel alone. I know you are with me. I know I am not alone, but I struggle at times to see you in my presence. Graciously grant me your peace, so that I may continue forward with courage and love.

In your name we pray.

Amen.



# What About Peter?

Is somebody absent from the picture? An estranged family member? A friend who disappeared when they heard about your health or the health of your loved one? If you find yourself in this situation, you may be asking "Where are they? How could they be so selfish? Don't they love me?" There are no easy answers to these difficult questions. However, just as we have reflected on the abandonment of Christ by the Apostles, we especially remember one Apostle in particular. That apostle's name is Peter, "The Rock."

The man to whom Christ trusted with the keys to Paradise not only didn't show up to support Jesus in his final moments, he publicly denied even knowing Christ. It would be easy for us to write Peter off as though he did not care. It would be a simple answer to our questions to give up on Peter. Among the many questions we may ask when someone is not around, the most important question we should ask is "What did Jesus do?" Did he reject Peter? Did he say "I'm through with you, Cephas!" He certainly seems to have had the right to do so. After all, he had just died upon the cross for the salvation of mankind. If anyone was permitted to hold another accountable, it was Jesus. Once again, Christ offers us another way forward.

**Read: John 21:15-19**

Peter had denied Christ. Peter was not there when Christ needed him the most. Peter abandoned the one who was to bring about the salvation of the world. Jesus, resurrected from the dead, sat and ate with the one who rejected him. This is a remarkable feat for any of us to consider on its own. But Jesus went further. He did not just tolerate Peter. He accepted Peter on his own terms. Asking Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 21:17) and Peter’s reply “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (John 21:17) gives us the answer to the questions we ask about those we notice missing in our own time of trial. Peter may not have been there, but he still loved the Lord. He was weak, he was fallible, but that did not mean that Peter did not love his Savior. Peter’s response to Jesus’ questions, “I love you” offers us an alternative to the assumptions we may have about those we wish were in our presence.

If Christ could hand Peter the task of guiding the Church after Peter’s denial, what does that mean for those of us who must reconcile with our friends and family once our loved one has passed away? Can we do like Christ? Can we reach out to those who may have hurt us, and our loved one and try to show compassion for them? Do we truly know why they are

not around when we need them? Are we making assumptions about them that are not honest appraisals of reality? Christ entrusted the Church to the one who denied him. Are we to deny those who run away from sharing in our grief and our love in our time of need?

### **Let us pray:**

Eternal Father,

You never promised that the way of Christianity would be easy. This may be one of the greatest challenges I/we have faced. It seems to us that we are abandoned by our loved one, left to carry our cross alone. Help me/us to seek peace and love with those who are not here. Help me/us to avoid making assumptions about their motives. Let me/us love them even more and continue to offer them the hand of peace and friendship, so that we may seek healing together.

In the name of the Redeemer of the World.

Amen.



Doubts  
&  
Fears

I was once told by a spiritual director that one of the most insidious temptations by the devil is to cause God's children to doubt not only the existence of our Creator, but to doubt his mercy as well. One of the most difficult parts of facing death is the unknown. Many people may feel guilty for doubting God's mercy, guilty for fearing death. "Am I a bad Christian because I am asking God to cure me? Will God be angry with me because I don't want to die?" These are common feelings. Doubt seeks to destroy the peace that God offers us through the grace of the sacraments and those he has sent to serve us. We must not forget that Christ himself seemed to have his own doubts; that he had his own personal agony and experienced great pain and suffering.

In the garden of Gethsemane Christ prayed to the Father, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ was just like us in every way except sin. This means that, like all of mankind, Christ experienced fear, he experienced anguish. As he faced his coming Passion in that garden, Christ struggled to accept and to understand what was to come. Though he was fully human and fully God, he had not yet felt the pain of the lash, the humiliation of the crowd's chants, the burning of the crown of thorns. The question: "what is to become of me tomorrow?" was



very real to Christ in the garden. We should not cause ourselves undue suffering worrying about our doubts and our fears. Our savior himself expressed similar feelings when he cried out to our God. He sweat drops of blood because his suffering was so great. He knows how you feel and he will be there to offer his strength and compassion.

What causes our fears? For many of us it is the question “Will God forgive me for my failures? Is the life I lived good enough to allow me to be welcomed into Paradise? Let us read from scripture once again and then consider the Centurion at the cross and the infinite mercy that God offers even the man who killed his Only Begotten Son; a man now known to the Church and history as Saint Longinus.

**Read: Matthew 27:15-56**

### **Reflection:**

The hot sun glared down upon the man’s brow. His eyes gazed toward the sky. Today was going to be a long day in the sweltering heat. Standing in the morning sun he thought about his wife and family. His son was growing faster than he imagined. It seemed that he missed so much early on, and now he tried to be there as much as possible. He had been separated from them for a few years just after his first son was

born because of his job, and he had missed all of the “firsts.” The first words, the first steps, all of those memories he was not afforded because he was far away, fulfilling the needs of his family in the only way he knew how: through grit and dedication to his work. Those were difficult years, but now he had the pleasure of returning to his family each night. He was grateful to be back. His job was certainly not for everyone. Most avoided it as much as they could, but a few were willing to bear the burden and bear it they did. Some even seemed to enjoy the work, no matter how unpleasant it may have looked to others. With the job came a certain sense of power, of being a man in a world where no one was of any consequence. Unfortunately, with the job came many downsides. Some people were afraid of him; others just accepted him as a necessary nuisance to put up with; few really knew him. He was okay with that. All he wanted was to care for his family and know their love.

His mind returned to the present, jolted back by the bite of an ornery fly, which the man swatted and disposed of swiftly. He stood there waiting to get on with the day. A small crowd had begun to gather, and he knew more would follow. He felt anxious when their eyes focused on him. “Do they respect me? What are they thinking? I’m just like them. Why do they look at me like that? I’m just doing my job.” He got lost in

thought a lot while he waited on days like today, perhaps as a way to distract him from the job. He didn't particularly like his job but he didn't seem to hate it either. Some days it's possible he even enjoyed it. But something was different today, something struck him odd.

He waited impatiently. He liked to just get it over with and not waste time. Finally his companions arrived, and he went straight to work. Holding a steel spike in his hand, he raised his hammer above his head and brought it down with gladiatorial force, striking steel on steel. The clang reverberated in his ears. Again and again he repeated the process until the first spike was securely in place. As he moved on to the next spike he got into a rhythm: swing, clang, swing, clang, swing, clang... . He heard nothing but his own breathing and the clang of the hammer. All other noise was drowned out. Not even the large crowd that had gathered was noticeable to him. With each strike of the hammer the steel spike imbedded deeper and deeper into the wood. After he drove the second spike into the wood beam, he moved on to the third. Swing, clang, swing, clang, clang, clang, clang. The crowd cheered as he fastened the last spike into place. He motioned the others to come closer in order to help raise the beam upright. Amidst the cheering, the man could hear other things, hateful things, coming from some of the

people. They were not directed at him, and yet, for some reason today they penetrated his wall of defense that he had built up over the years in order to drown out all other sounds except those of his simple hammer and spike. The muscles and sinew of the men strained as they heaved the giant beam upright. The man stood back, gazed upon his handiwork, and smiled.

The sun was at the height of the sky and his eyes squinted and strained to take in his accomplishment. As he looked, something struck him as if with the hammer he had just wielded. The man was confused. The more he watched what unfolded before him the more his own peace turned into an unease. He looked down to his right hand and stared at the hammer there. He looked back up and took in the scene. Three men before him, crucified upon the wood of the cross. He had done this time and again, taken his part in the play, fulfilled his role. So why was this time different. He saw the women, there, at the one man's feet. The sign above his head, "King of Jews" meant that he was a rebel, that he deserves all of this. But unlike so many before him, he did not curse the crowd, he did not plead for mercy. His resolve was true. The centurion now was shaken, and the words that the man upon the cross shouted to the sky turned his unease into terror and sorrow. As the Christ cried out "*Eloi, Eloi,*

*lema sabachthani?"* (Mark 15:34) the centurion was overcome and began to weep. This was no ordinary man. The walls came tumbling down and the centurion was left to his own solitude in that moment. Christ looked down and saw through to his soul and smiled. A warmth began in the centurion's heart and began to permeate his entire being. And as Jesus let out his final breaths, the centurion understood his place in this drama and proclaimed from his own lips the truth that had unfolded before him, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (Matt 27:54).

How often are we standing with the centurion? Through our own weakness or complacency are we the ones driving the nails into Christ? We are the ones who crucified our God. It is our own sins of today that placed him upon the tree and fastened him there. And though he could have leapt from that instrument of torment at any moment, he chose to stay, so that we, like the centurion may be redeemed. So that, regardless of our failings, regardless of our poor choices, our mistakes, we, too, are afforded the opportunity to witness our own redemption, our own salvation. We, too, can see the face of God, and live.

## **Let us pray:**

Merciful Father,

In my weakness I have sinned against you and against others. Please, I ask for your forgiveness and mercy, so that I may one day live in your presence in heaven. I desire to be reconciled to you, Father. Help me in the future to choose to do good and avoid evil. Grant me the grace to see my sins more clearly and recognize my inability to overcome such things without your aid. I wish to live according to your will and model my life after the example of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Without you, this is not possible. I lay myself at your mercy, humbled in your presence. Forgive me, heal me, graciously grant that I may be your servant.

Amen.

**I am sorry...**

Bitter words upon my tongue

I agonize over every syllable

They pierce my pride like the spear thrust deep into  
Christ's side

I am weak, I am haughty, I am a sinner

Lo, those words which were bitter are sweetness to  
the ear, they warm and comfort the heart of the one I  
harmed,

They are balm for the wounds inflicted on my enemies  
and my loved ones alike

The bitterness, the agony within me, gives rise to  
mercy from the Creator

He leaves a joyous aftertaste in my mouth

A soothing touch to my soul

It is in the asking of forgiveness that we begin healing  
wounded lives

Practice in matters small and it will be made easier in  
matters great. Say it freely, and sincerely.

I am sorry, I am sorry, I am sorry.







**“I thirst.”**

(John 19:28)

Among the most basic needs for life are food and water. Without these the human person will die. However, the human relationship with food is more complex and profound than this simple fact of reality. We gather together at meals with family on holidays to share stories and fellowship with one another. The act of offering a stranger a meal so they do not go hungry unites two people into communion with one another. Food and drink are not just physical elements that sustain bodily integrity; they are also means by which we show love and affection for one another.

When a child is sick, a mother fixes chicken noodle soup. When a father returns home from work in the fields, a daughter brings him a glass of tea. A son prepares jelly sandwiches for a breakfast in bed on Mother's day. When a family member dies, the community lays casseroles and salads at the door of those who mourn. Perhaps this is why nutrition and hydration at the end of life is such a difficult thing for all of us to approach in a meaningful and moral way that both respects the dignity of our loved one, as well as coincides with our beliefs as people of faith. I must say, the two are not truly in conflict with one another. Perhaps what does cause the turmoil within us as we make decisions regarding nutrition and hydration is our own misunderstanding, misconceptions, and fears

about the end of life and its connection with food and water.

Let us consider this topic from a spiritual and medical approach to help us understand the complexity of the issue. As a person approaches death, they will expend less energy. We burn the calories in food in order to perform our daily activities. As our activity level decreases, it is understandable that our need for the same amounts of food would also decrease. Appetites change as a person approaches death. Think of a car in the driveway. With a full tank of gas the car can go anywhere. But what if the car is not started very often? What if it is only driven around the block a couple times a week instead of the usual cross-country trips it once took? Filling the tank becomes less frequent because less gas is used. It is similar with our body. Our tank is only so big, and as our body begins to shut down and prepare for death, it needs less “gas” to continue onward.

It is not uncommon for family members to eat less, to prefer certain things to their usual favorites. They may not feel hungry anymore and may be satisfied with juices, ice water, or other liquids. Though it is okay to encourage a loved one to eat, always offering, it is not necessary to make sure they eat; they simply may not need the extra energy.

Perhaps we think, “If they could just eat something, they will get better.” As hard as it may be to accept, this simply may not be the case. In some cases, eating and drinking can actually cause more suffering. This is the case for people who have diseases of the digestive system.

This discussion will be frank to help avoid confusion. However, we continually want to keep the conversation centered on Christ; if we do this, we shall proceed along the path together with our Savior. And so we reflect once again on Sacred Scripture and the message that it offers us now.

**Read: John 19:28**

In the moments before his death, Christ cries out: “I thirst” (John 19:28). He receives a simple reprieve from the harshness of a dry throat and mouth by the soldier offering him the sponge of wine to ease his suffering. The wine he received did not sustain his life, but it eased his suffering at the moment of death. Let us not forget this as we talk about when it is morally acceptable to forgo nutrition and hydration.

A person who is aware of their surrounding and able to make decisions for himself/herself can tell us when they are hungry and thirsty; when they feel

like eating and when they do not. It is important for us to listen to them, just as the centurion heeded the cry of Christ. Forcing food and drink upon a person can cause some frustration for the person who is dying. Imagine you just finished a Thanksgiving meal, stuffed to the brim and someone brings out pie. You are full and could not possibly eat another bite, but the host insists that you eat not one, but two slices! Imagine how frustrating that would be if, after constantly saying “No, thank you,” the person insists with even more vigor and does not take “No” for an answer. The host has the best of intentions, but their insistence does not respect the dignity of the guest to make the decision for themselves about whether they are still hungry for dessert. Offer your loved one the opportunity to eat, but do not hound them. The act of offering is enough to express your love and concern for them.

We discussed one reason why a person may no longer be hungry: they need less energy. Another reason could be that their body has begun to shut down. As a person approaches their death, their vital signs will begin to decrease. A person’s blood pressure will begin to drop, their pulse will become less consistent, and respirations will decrease and become shallow. We need to remember what the result of this is. The blood flowing through the body

carries nutrients to the various organs and other systems of the body and carries away waste. As the blood pressure lowers and the pulse becomes irregular and the breathing decreases, the body is no longer moving blood, along with the nutrients and waste, at the same level that it was when the vital signs of life are at their normal level.

Imagine a food delivery truck and a garbage truck driving on a highway with a speed of 55 miles per hour. They can move freight at a greater pace than if the speed were only 25 miles per hour. With a slower speed, the trucks cannot possibly deliver as much freight in the same amount of time as when they are allowed to go 55 miles per hour. It is similar with the body. The kidneys need blood flow to continue to filter out waste. As blood flow decreases, kidney function will decrease and the ability of the body to get rid of waste will also decrease. As the blood pressure drops, the nutrients in the stomach will take longer to process, if they are processed at all, because the stomach needs healthy nutrient-rich blood to function. Nutrients and fluids will not be absorbed in the intestines at the same rate if blood flow and oxygen are not at their regular levels. All of this means that a person may lose appetite as they approach death because their body simply cannot process the food and water that is placed into their body.

Again, it is important to understand the basics of the physical body and what is going on as a person approaches death to help us make decisions that not only respect the dignity of our loved one, but also help us to understand why things are happening as they occur.

The next major question we may face is: “What do we do when a person is unable to make decisions for themselves, or they are incapable of communicating their wishes because of dementia or some other ailment?”

This is perhaps a time when we must rely first and foremost upon the grace of God and the teachings of the our Mother Church to guide us in the decisions we make. Each Sunday we celebrate and experience the greatest of meals, the Bread of Life, offered to us by Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We are spiritually nourished by receiving the living God in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. If we believe that we become what we receive, then by receiving the Son of Man in the Eucharist we are offered the chance to make the decision in union with his will for us and our loved one. Avail yourself of the sacraments and seek out Church teaching in order to prepare yourselves for making a decision grounded in the true good of your loved one and yourself.

Contrary to what some philosophies may propose, our body is uniquely married to our soul. We are “embodied spirits.” As long as your loved one is alive, they remain the person that they were before their illness or injury. This is not always easy to accept. Having experienced loved ones with Alzheimer’s and dementia, I recall people saying things like “This is not the person I married” or “This is not my mother, it’s only a shell.” The pain that we experience when we see those we deeply care about lost in the fog of forgetfulness can cause us to react in such a way. However, we must work even harder when we are tempted to deny that our loved one is still present. I spoke at one woman’s funeral and I stated it in this way:

Where there is life, there is hope..., there is love..., there is faith....

Not a false hope that defies logic that said she was going to get better; but a hope in what was to come after her pain and suffering were over. Not a false notion of love that views anything pleasing as one’s goal in life, but a love of sacrifice, of her willingness to be present to any and all who came to her door. And not a blind faith, but a faith that trusts in the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob, of David, and



Ruth, and Esther, and Job, and the Father of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is not easy, but we must reject the popular cultural notions that say that we are a “ghost in a machine,” that the soul leaves when the mind fails. This is not true. Even when we cannot intellectualize the world around us, we are still here. Remember that as an infant, you were completely unable to speak, to perceive the world in the same way as an adult, limited in many ways and completely reliant upon others for survival. In spite of these realities, as an infant, we surely are more than just what appears on the surface. So it is with those who are incoherent, completely dependent on others for basic human needs, non-verbal, and “gone,” in what seems like every external means of perceiving. But they are not gone. Their soul is still present and united with the body, and our presence, our acts of love and compassion, have profound meaning to them even if they cannot personally tell us so.

This does not mean that we are obligated to continue every possible means of medical intervention no matter what. For example, it is permissible to cease chemotherapy treatments for cancer that has metastasized (spread from its origin to another part of the body) if the therapy is unlikely

to cure the person or create undue suffering directly from the chemotherapy. If the burden of the medical care outweighs the potential outcome it is not obligatory to continue along a curative path, but allowable to begin palliative care. We read in the Catholic Catechism:

Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected (Catholic Catechism, 2278).

I am sure the next question at hand is "How do we know when we should provide a 'feeding tube'?" (artificial nutrition and/or hydration by means of intravenous fluids, nasalgastro tube, TPN or by other means) The answer to this question is not always so clear as it may first seem. The circumstances of each

particular person will require a review of their medical and physical needs. This is not to say that all decisions should be left solely to the advice or direction of the medical staff, but it does mean that medical staff can provide us the information we need in order to make the best decision for our loved one and for ourselves. Remember, we are in communion with one another, and sometimes, even if our doctors or nurses tell us we only have one choice, or our loved one requests us to take certain actions, we may not be able to comply, no matter how much we love them, no matter how much we desire to follow their wishes, if their wishes would endanger our own salvation or theirs. Blessed John Paul II warns us of this when he discusses the issue of euthanasia in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (the Gospel of Life):

To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out through so-called ‘assisted suicide’ means to cooperate in, and at times to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice which can never be excused, even if it is requested. In a remarkably relevant passage Saint Augustine writes that ‘it is never licit to kill another: even if he should wish it, indeed if he request it because, hanging between life and death,

he begs for help in freeing the soul struggling against the bonds of the body and longing to be released; nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live.' Even when not motivated by a selfish refusal to be burdened with the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia must be called a false mercy, and indeed a disturbing 'perversion' of mercy. True 'compassion' leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear. Moreover, the act of euthanasia appears all the more perverse if it is carried out by those, like relatives, who are supposed to treat a family member with patience and love, or by those, such as doctors, who by virtue of their specific profession are supposed to care for the sick person even in the most painful terminal stages (Evangelium Vitae, p. 66; March 25, 1995).

We must be vigilant to make decisions that will offer our loved one the path to peace and comfort without risking hastening their death or placing our own salvation in jeopardy. Keeping this in mind, as we have already stated, there are times when it **IS** morally permissible to forgo artificial means of

hydration and nutrition. Just because we do not give our loved one a feeding tube or IV fluids does not necessarily mean we have committed euthanasia.

However, a terminal diagnosis, or even progression of serious illness does not automatically permit one to forgo nutrition and hydration, whether by ordinary or artificial means. The following questions are helpful in deciding when/if it is morally acceptable (according to Catholic teaching in obedience to the Magisterium) to refrain from placing a “feeding tube” and/or IV fluids. Ask your doctor/nurse the following questions when making such a decision. This is not an exhaustive list of questions and so it is important that you also seek counsel from your local priest/diocese to help you in this process. Holy Mother Church is here to help you.

1. Does your loved one have a diseased GI tract that would prohibit the absorption or processing of nutrition/hydration? If yes, then no matter what you do, the addition of food and water will do nothing but cause greater suffering. It is of no advantage to your loved one and in fact, may cause them greater suffering. If your loved one cannot process the food and/or fluids that are introduced into their body by way of a “feeding tube” or IV

fluids, then it is like pouring water into an already full glass. In cases when the GI tract cannot process food and/or water, it is morally permissible to forgo artificial nutrition and hydration.

2. Has your loved one's kidneys/liver/other filtration organ ceased to function properly to the point where it is unable to process fluids? Again, this is similar to having a diseased GI tract. If additional fluids cannot be processed then introducing more fluids may cause complications such as severe water retention; and if this is so, it is morally acceptable to forgo artificial nutrition and hydration.
3. Is your loved one too weak to survive any procedure or the travel to have a procedure done to provide artificial nutrition and/or hydration? Would the procedure or travel for the procedure hasten your loved one's death? In this case, the potential gain may not equal the risk, and the suffering may be disproportionate to the potential gain. If the procedure would likely hasten your loved one's death, then there is no requirement to attempt the procedure and it is permissible to forgo artificial hydration and/or nutrition.

Remember that there are different levels of intervention. An IV is not as invasive as placing a port for a feeding tube. If the least invasive measure can be tolerated, then it should be attempted and monitored.

4. Does your loved one have memory issues or a history of behaviors in which they pull out their IV, catheter, dialysis, or other medical devices? If this is true, then placing an NG tube or TPN line may actually pose a greater threat to your loved one's life and their suffering than forgoing artificial nutrition and/or hydration. If this is the case, it is permissible to forgo artificial nutrition and/or hydration.
5. Does your loved one already have an NG tube/TPN/IV fluids or other medical means to supply artificial hydration and it is causing complications such as an uncontrolled infection at the port site, extreme diarrhea, aspiration, or other complications that cause disproportionate suffering? If this is so, then it is morally acceptable to forgo artificial nutrition and hydration.
6. Does your loved one have any other medical condition that would prevent them from receiving artificial nutrition and hydration

(causing disproportionate suffering)? If so, then it is morally permissible to forgo artificial nutrition and hydration.

If the previous questions are not answered in the affirmative, then one ought to consider artificial hydration and/or nutrition and attempt a trial period with artificial nutrition and/or hydration, monitoring constantly for any complications that would cause disproportionate suffering. If complications cause disproportionate suffering, then it is morally permissible to discontinue the hydration and nutrition.

We must make sure that one thing is clarified because it can sometimes be misunderstood. When determining “disproportionate suffering,” one must factor in only that which is a direct result of the procedure/presence of the artificial means of hydration and/or nutrition. For example: if the nutrition and hydration will prolong the life of a person who has advanced Parkinson’s, it is not legitimate to argue that living with Parkinson’s counts as disproportionate suffering as compared to starving to death. We are referring to things like infections from the TPN port, diarrhea due to artificial nutrition, severe edema due to IV fluids. These are direct results



of the introduction of artificial hydration and nutrition.

The suffering that comes from your loved one's illness/injury is not to be ignored but, as Blessed John Paul II directs us, the suffering they experience from the disease never justifies hastening the end of their life, especially by means of forgoing nutrition and hydration. When this is the case, joining with their suffering and being present to your loved one is central to the Christian understanding of love.

The following graph offers another way to approach this topic (since some people are visual thinkers perhaps this graph will assist in the decision making process). It is important that this graph is used only as a guide. Consult your parish priest or local diocese if you need more specific guidance regarding artificial hydration and nutrition based on a more complex diagnosis or if you have any doubts regarding your loved one's care.

Remember, as has already been said, when referring to "disproportionate suffering" we are only talking about suffering that is a direct result from the means of artificial nutrition and hydration. We cannot withhold hydration and nutrition (whether artificial or ordinary) from loved ones because they are enduring suffering from their illness or injury.

The following graph (pages 76-77) is designed to move from top to bottom. It is a series of questions that provide instances in which it may or not be permissible to forgo artificial nutrition/hydration. This list of questions is not exhaustive and therefore it is important that this simple graph is not seen as a definitive tool for making such an important decision.

Begin with the first box at the top of the first page; if the answer is “yes” then forgoing artificial nutrition and hydration is morally permissible. If the answer is “no” then move onto the next box; continue until you reach the end, or answer “yes” to a question.

## **Let us pray:**

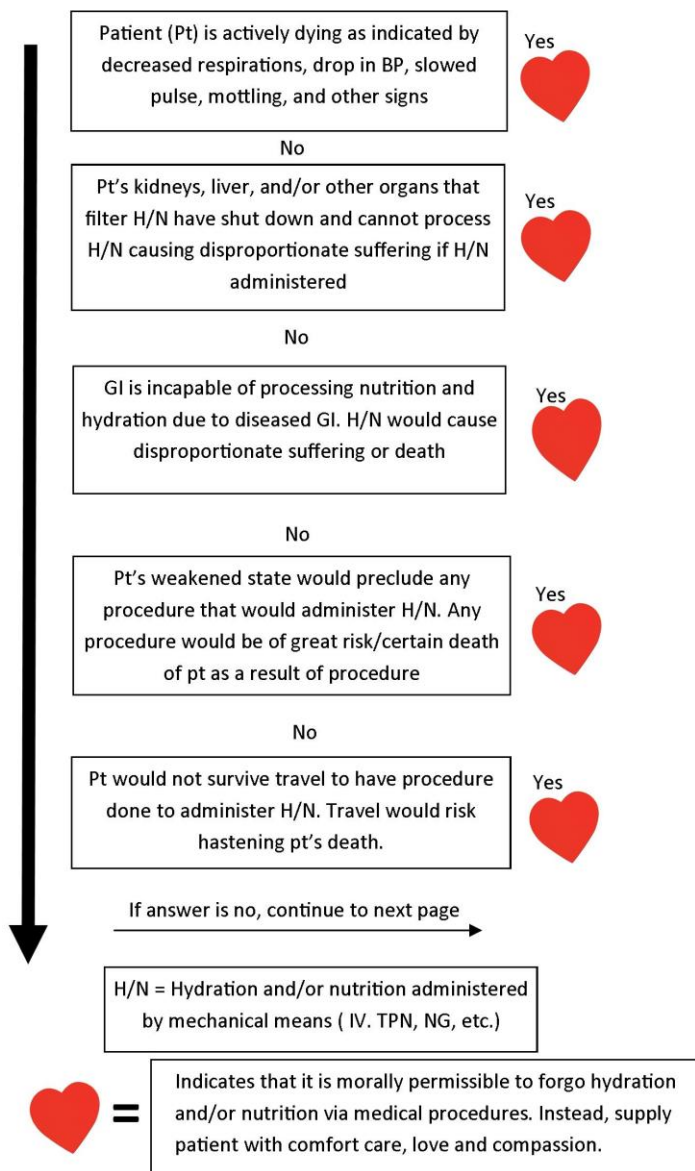
Merciful Father,

We face a difficult decision and we implore you to graciously offer us the strength, courage, knowledge and obedience to do your will for the sake of our loved one. All of this seems so difficult, so foreign to us; we rely on you for strength. Help us to know the right path forward. Help us to see what is good for our loved one. Allow us the peace to see your will and to choose the good for the sake of our loved one and for the sake of our own souls. We desire to follow you; we desire to live according to your designs. Speak to our hearts and minds with the wisdom of your eternal Word and grant that we may not err in our choice.

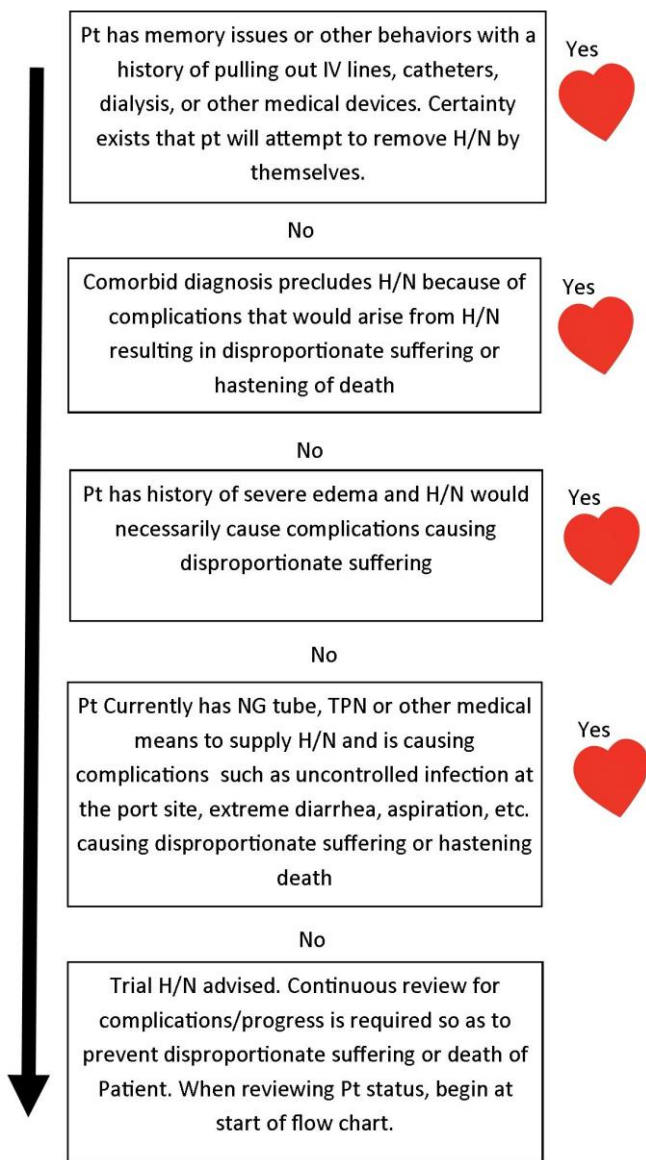
In your name we pray.

Amen.

## Into Your Hands Lord



## Into Your Hands Lord







**“An angel from heaven  
appeared to him and  
strengthened him.”**

(Luke 22:43)

## **The use of pain medications**

It is likely that as you or your loved one approach death, the illness will be accompanied by physical pain. This is especially the case with a diagnosis of cancer, heart failure, or serious injuries. We can agonize over using pain medications or anti-anxiety medications because of our fear of harming our loved one, especially the fear of addiction. Spiritually we may be concerned that we are “weak” if we do not accept the suffering as another means by which we can become holier. These are important concerns that we should consider.

Take some time now and reflect upon, and participate in the ancient devotion of praying the Stations of the Cross in preparation for the following discussion. (The list of the stations can be found on page eighty-two.)



**Begin:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit +

*Recite the Station, kneel in silence, stand, then pray:*

Leader: We adore you oh Christ and we praise you

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

### **Our Father**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be they name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

### **Hail Mary**

Hail Mary, full of grace, the lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen

### **Glory Be**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

**Repeat these same prayers for each of the following stations:**

- I. Jesus is condemned to death
- II. Jesus carries his cross
- III. Jesus falls the first time
- IV. Jesus meets his mother
- V. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross
- VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
- VII. Jesus falls the second time
- VIII. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- IX. Jesus falls the third time
- X. Jesus' clothes are taken away
- XI. Jesus is nailed to the cross
- XII. Jesus dies on the cross
- XIII. Jesus is taken down from the cross
- XIV. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

It is true that our faith teaches us that suffering, especially physical suffering has a redemptive quality to it if we unite that suffering to that of our Savior's suffering upon the cross. This is particularly special when the suffering we are facing is during our own walk to Calvary. God permits suffering in this world, though he does not directly cause or will it. Through Christ's suffering, humanity was redeemed and offered salvation. Through our suffering we may enter into a deeper relationship with Christ as we walk with him in his Passion. However, this does not mean that we are all called to suffer equally. Christ himself, as has been seen throughout the scripture readings offered in this companion book, was relieved of suffering many times during his Passion.

While in the garden, an angel of the Lord came and strengthened him. Veronica offered the comfort of a veil to wipe the blood, sweat and tears from his eyes. Simon of Cyrene was put into service to carry the burden of the weight of the wood. Christ was offered drink upon the cross. Time and again, he received small moments of relief from his pain and agony. Should we consider ourselves any different in discerning our own suffering? If Christ was not too proud to accept relief, are we not allowed to accept relief of our own suffering? Christ was certainly not "weak" for accepting such kindness and relief, and we

are not “weak” for accepting such things for ourselves or our loved ones.

As has been said many times, each of us must place ourselves in the presence of God, receiving the sacraments and the grace that accompanies them, in order to fully understand how much suffering we are each called to bear. With the advancements of modern medicine, we have the means to alleviate and, in some cases, eliminate all physical and emotional pain that accompanies the dying process. What modern medicine cannot answer for us is “Should we eliminate the pain?” The answer to this question will be different for every person. The Church has offered us some guidance with regards to the use of medications for the purpose of alleviating pain. One particular document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discussing Euthanasia addresses this issue directly. There we find the following words:

According to Christian teaching, however, suffering, especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God's saving plan; it is in fact a sharing in Christ's passion and a union with the redeeming sacrifice which He offered in obedience to the Father's will....  
Nevertheless it would be imprudent to

impose a heroic way of acting as a general rule. On the contrary, human and Christian prudence suggest for the majority of sick people the use of medicines capable of alleviating or suppressing pain, even though these may cause as a secondary effect semi-consciousness and reduced lucidity. As for those who are not in a state to express themselves, one can reasonably presume that they wish to take these painkillers, and have them administered according to the doctor's advice (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia, part III; May 5, 1980).

The Church tells us that some of us are called to accept the suffering and unite it with Christ's. However, She also recognizes that each person is called to carry a different cross. Each person's vocational call as they approach their death is very different. We are not all called to die in agony. It is perfectly acceptable, and in many cases advised, for us to use the gifts of modern medicine to offer relief to our physical and emotional pain by using medications. The Church is clear that for those who can no longer make decisions for themselves, there is a presumption that they should be offered that relief.

We must ensure that the spiritual needs of the person are also met in conjunction with the administration of pain medications. The use of many of these various medications may result in reduced coherence, consciousness and increased confusion and/or drowsiness. It is important, for those who are able, to have the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation and to offer prayers of contrition for the sake of the health and status of their soul. Since these medications can often prevent a person from being able to willfully engage in this sacrament, it is advisable, whenever possible, that a priest offer the sacrament before such medications are administered, or at least before the dosage level is high enough to cause these side effects. If for some reason, such as the pain being unbearable and that a priest is not readily available, and this cannot take place in a timely manner, it is not required that a person receive the sacrament of reconciliation prior to the administration of the higher levels of medications that would result in this decreased consciousness or coherence.

It is also important to realize that you or your loved one will not become “addicted” to these medications if they are administered by a medical professional. Addiction to medications happens when the administration of the medications is uncontrolled

and unsupervised. When medications are properly administered a person will not crave the medication the way a person who is addicted will. Do not be afraid to take medications out of fear of addiction. Do not forgo the alleviation of suffering for you or your loved one out of fear. You deserve relief from your suffering no less than our Savior was relieved from his.

### **Let us pray:**

Father,

Though we know that you do not will suffering, in your divine wisdom, you allow suffering to occur. So as not to allow your children to suffer alone, you sent us your Only Begotten Son to suffer on our behalf so that we may have hope in eternal salvation. When we suffer, when we are in agony, let us unite our pain to that of our Savior upon the Cross. And, if it is too much for us to bear, if it is not our burden to carry, please help us understand when you desire that our suffering be relieved through the means of modern medicine so that we may focus more intently upon the gifts and joys you have granted us. Let us be humble enough to recognize your will for us, even in the midst of pain.

Amen.







**“Father,  
into your hands  
I commend my spirit.”**

**(Luke 23:46)**

Saying “goodbye” is never easy. It is even more difficult when the “goodbye” will last a long time. Facing the reality that we will not see our loved one again until we are in God’s presence in Paradise is met with pain, anger, confusion, regrets, guilt, and many other negative feelings. But it can also be met with joy and hope for what will surely be a beautiful reunion with one another in the Heavenly Kingdom.

**Read: Luke 23:46**

As Christ hung upon the cross, he had to say “goodbye” to those closest to him. The pain he must have felt to see the anguish upon his mother’s face! The woman who gave birth to him, nourished him from her breast, raised him to manhood, and even gave him the nudge he needed at the Wedding of Cana to begin his ministry knelt at the foot of the cross, helpless and in agony. Simeon’s prophesy at the temple, declaring to Mary, “And you yourself a sword will pierce” (Luke 2:35) was coming true before all gathered there, and none knew that pain greater than Jesus as he saw the unbearable blade of suffering striking at the chest of his mother. As he prepared to give up his spirit, he looked towards her and, with the comfort and compassion only a son could offer, he said “Goodbye” in his own way. “Woman, behold, your son” (John 19:26-27); offering her to the whole world

to watch over and to show her the mission she was about to begin.

It is good to say goodbye to one another. It is good to tell your loved ones “till we meet again.” It is just as important for those of us who will remain to offer our loved one the support and the encouragement to leave us and join the cloud of witnesses in the City of God. It may be hard to do; we want to keep our loved one with us. This is a time to realize what a blessing it is to have shared in the love that makes you want to keep them with you. Many times those who are dying will hold on until they are given the permission to leave or know that their family and friends will be all right. Tell them, “You can go now. We will be okay. You taught us well. We have one another.”

There may be times when we actually wish our loved one would pass away so they do not suffer any longer. These feelings can often be accompanied by guilt. “I asked God to let her die. Does this mean I don’t love her?” “What kind of son asks for their father to die?” “Is it wrong of me to ask for God to let them die?” These are very real feelings and very personal questions. The truth is, you are asking God to take your loved one home with Him. Don’t we all wish for our loved ones to join God in Paradise? Isn’t the desire

to see them suffer no longer a noble desire? Of course it is.

We see our loved one suffering in our midst and we know that the end is certain. We wish for God to have mercy on them and end their suffering so that their eternal rejoicing may begin. Do not feel guilty for wishing your loved one's suffering to end. God will take them on His terms anyway, so praying that he calls them home sooner in no way is something to be ashamed about, as long as one is doing it out of love and compassion for one's family member or friend.

Other times we will ask God to let them stay with us regardless of their suffering. Then we face similar challenges and questions: "How selfish am I that I would rather let them live in pain than to let them go?" "I just can't let them go, why can't I let them go?" "Am I a bad person because I don't want to say 'goodbye'?" Your desire to keep your loved one with you comes from your love for them. It is hard to say goodbye. You are not a bad person for wanting them to stay with you and not die. Remember, this life is not the end. Through the mercy of God, we have the hope in the Resurrection, and those who go before us are not far from us. Those who reside in heaven with God see all that He sees and are given the gift of knowing and seeing us from the vantage point of the Heavenly

City. They become advocates to our God as intercessors for our sake. We do not fully lose them just because we can no longer see, hear, or touch them. They are still very real and very close to us. If you find yourself having difficulty saying “Goodbye” pray for them that God will receive them into the Eternal Kingdom; offer petitions and penance for all souls in purgatory to aid them in entering through the heavenly gates; ask God for the grace to accept their passing; pray that He grant them the joy of joining the multitude of saints who watch over us and pray for us to our God. What a beautiful gift to have someone who knows you personally to reside in heaven, petitioning to our Creator on your behalf!

## **Let us pray:**

Saint Benedict, patron Saint of a peaceful death, we implore you this day as we struggle with the storm of emotions, doubts, fears, and questions. We ask for your prayers that our loved one may enter into eternal glory in peace. Please pray for our sister/brother in Christ that their suffering may come to an end and they may join you, all the angels and saints, in heaven in the company of the Trinity. We do not know the hour ordained by God when our beloved shall leave this world so we ask that you intercede on our behalf that we may be comforted by God and that he grant us the patience and strength to endure whatever we may face, for however long it takes. Help us to see God's divine plan in all that we experience in the coming hours, days, weeks or months. We place our trust in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, of all that is visible and invisible.

We humbly offer these petitions, in union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Amen.



**What Are  
Your Wishes?**

Have you had the conversation with your family and friends on what your wishes are for yourself? Have you considered that you should do this before you are no longer able to make decisions for yourself?

Tragically, many of us will face an ending to this life that we may not be fully conscious or aware of what is going on around us. We may also not be capable of communicating our wishes at that crucial time.

This conversation can be difficult, especially in a society that tries to convince us that death will not come, that we can escape the inevitable. However, it is important to allow your family to know what it is that you desire, for their sake, and yours. This is an opportunity to prepare to continue to witness the message of the Gospel even when you are no longer able to speak. Since this is not an easy topic, I offer to you a letter I wrote to my own family during my graduate studies in theology. May it help you to approach this difficult subject with peace and comfort. You may use any or all of it for your own guidelines to your family.



*“Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” These words of Pope John Paul II the Great have been a guiding light to my life since I first heard them in college. I hope that you may see them as a guiding light if something should ever happen to me and you are called to make certain decisions on my behalf. If I am stricken with illness, or have a sudden accident and you are called upon to make decisions regarding life and death on my behalf remember these words. It is perhaps unusual for someone to address such things as I am about to do, but I do not want you burdened with tough decisions without any guidance as to my wishes if the circumstances should arise.*

*When we are called by God to join Him in eternity, we must leave this earthly life, in dying we have the same mission and vocation that we were called to in life. In death, just as in life, it is vital to fulfill Jesus’ command: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34). Every decision made regarding my care must be one made out of love; not only for love of me, but love for yourselves, and love for the whole of humanity, and especially love for God. Such love cannot be ignored and cannot be replaced with false-mercy that people often fall victim to in difficult times. Created out of love by Him, for love of Him, we*

*must, in every action, seek to bring ourselves closer to Him; for union with God is and has always been our final end.*

*Decisions regarding life and death, especially if I am incapacitated, will not be easy. And so I ask you to remember the words of Blessed John Paul II, who continually reminded us of Christ's most frequent message, "do not be afraid!" Do not be afraid to make decisions. Rely on the wisdom of Holy Mother Church. Do not feel alone in this struggle. Seek out a priest or priests to give you guidance, and just as important, seek out a priest to receive spiritual blessings so that you may hear God's call more clearly. Each of us is called to a vocation of love. In making decisions think of how the decisions you make will aid me in this vocation. God entrusted me to your care when I was a child, and there may come a day when he entrusts me to your care as an adult. By your example and witness to the faith I have accepted this vocation and have tried my best to live it. Help me to continue this vocation to the last.*

*I have thought and prayed about what I wish for myself should certain circumstances arise. If I am incapable of making decisions for myself, I want you to pray before you make any decision. Realizing that sometimes decisions must be made quickly, a short*

*prayer is enough, but do not leave God out of your decisions. Rely on Him to grant you the wisdom and insight into the task you are facing.*

*Please do all that you can to make sure that I am able to receive the sacraments as fully as I am able.*

*If something should happen that an illness or injury leaves me unable to communicate with you, or make decisions for myself, for an extended length of time, I ask you to afford yourselves the opportunity to receive the sacraments of penance and Eucharist. I imagine such a situation may be a great burden. It is in these sacraments that I hope you will find the strength, and the consolation that the decisions you make are the will of God so that you may make them with confidence and without regret.*

*If you believe me to be suffering, pray for me. Do not burden yourselves with grief over my suffering. Pray for me that I may unite that suffering with that of Christ on the cross; that in my suffering I may bear witness to the selfless gift of God to humanity. I will need the strength to do this, and so I ask that you pray with me, out loud so that if I am in any way conscious, I may be encouraged by your prayers. Though we should not think ourselves more holy because we suffer, or that we should seek out suffering, Christ's sacrifice on the cross made*

*human suffering an opportunity for us to be sanctified and to draw us closer to him through our own suffering. It was Christ who sweat blood in the garden; he buckled under the weight of the wood of the cross; and he cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). God knew suffering through the suffering of His son on the cross. We see suffering through a different lens as Catholics. As Catholics we can rejoice in our suffering. "Consider it a joy brothers when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2). We rejoice because suffering can call us into a deeper relationship with our God and with His children. "We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song." St. Augustine knew what he was saying in this short summary of our Catholic faith. Being an Easter people, we have hope and joy in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and so we have the hope of our own resurrection. As Easter people, we also realize that without the Passion, there never would have been an Easter. Without suffering, there would have been no resurrection. Christ, in the garden of Gethsemane, in the midst of his agony, gave himself over to the suffering in order that a perfect offering may be made. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). In that moment he freely chose to suffer for our sake, so that we may be called children of God. Even more astounding, even after*

*suffering the indignities and punishment of the trial, flogging, march to Calvary, and then the crucifixion, he did not reject the Father for making him suffer. Instead he hands himself over once again to the Father, calling out: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). I will need your aid and support that I may do the same, so that through my suffering I am not tempted to reject God because of the suffering I am called to endure, but rather, give myself completely over to His care and concern.*

*I do not believe that I am worthy of martyrdom, nor do I think that I am special because I desire that if I am to suffer, it be holy suffering. There are many ways to help ease my suffering if it becomes too much for you to see me in such a state, or if you believe it is more than I should bear. Medication is one way that is allowable. Do not hesitate if you feel it necessary or in my best interest. More powerful than medication is, and always will be, prayer. Pray with me, read the scriptures with me, read the writings of the saints to me, the Rule of Saint Benedict and especially the Liturgy of the Hours. Allow me to listen to Catholic and inspiring music. Doctors cannot, regardless of what they may say, claim to know when a person is no longer conscious based on brain scans, unless the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead. The brain is one of God's most miraculous*

*creations. Always err on the side that I am aware of what is going on. If the doctors tell you that I am in a "persistent and vegetative state," once again I ask that you listen to guidance from Blessed John Paul II when he spoke about such a so-called "diagnosis".*

*Faced with patients in similar clinical conditions, there are some who cast doubt on the persistence of the "human quality" itself, almost as if the adjective "vegetative" (whose use is now solidly established), which symbolically describes a clinical state, could or should be instead applied to the sick as such, actually demeaning their value and personal dignity. In this sense, it must be noted that this term, even when confined to the clinical context, is certainly not the most felicitous (fortunate) when applied to human beings.*

*In opposition to such trends of thought, I feel the duty to reaffirm strongly that the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life. A man, even if seriously ill or disabled in the exercise of his highest*

*functions, is and always will be a man, and he will never become a "vegetable" or an "animal".*

*Even our brothers and sisters who find themselves in the clinical condition of a "vegetative state" retain their human dignity in all its fullness. The loving gaze of God the Father continues to fall upon them, acknowledging them as his sons and daughters, especially in need of help.*

*The sick person in a vegetative state, awaiting recovery or a natural end, still has the right to basic health care (nutrition, hydration, cleanliness, warmth, etc.), and to the prevention of complications related to his confinement to bed. He also has the right to appropriate rehabilitative care and to be monitored for clinical signs of eventual recovery.*

*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.*

*The obligation to provide the "normal care due to the sick in such cases" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Iura et Bona, p. IV) includes, in fact, the use of nutrition and hydration (cf. Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", Dans le Cadre, 2, 4, 4; Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, Charter of Health Care Workers, n. 120). The evaluation of probabilities, founded on waning hopes for recovery when the vegetative state is prolonged beyond a year, cannot ethically justify the cessation or interruption of minimal care for the patient, including nutrition and hydration. Death by starvation or dehydration is, in fact, the only possible outcome as a result of their withdrawal. In this sense it ends up becoming, if done knowingly and willingly, true and proper euthanasia by omission."*  
*(John Paul II, March 20, 2004)*



*Do not listen to the doctors if they try to speak of me as a vegetable. I will never be a vegetable. I will either be a living person, or I am dead. I can never be a vegetable. I wish for you to give me the care that I deserve. According to JP II, at the very least I deserve to be fed and given fluids. There are exceptions to this, as the Church has pointed out. If the administration of artificial nutrition and/or hydration causes an undue burden, it is permitted to forgo such measures. If, for instance, intravenous fluids are causing severe and uncontrolled edema which causes congestive heart failure, it would be permissible to withdraw the IV. Also, if, for example, I have a disease of the GI tract that prevents my body from processing any nutrition, it would be permissible to forgo such measures as a nasal feeding tube or TPN feeding.*

*That being said, if I am being sustained by respirators or defibrillators, you may be called to make a decision whether or not to continue such means in order to keep me living. Through consultation with clergy and with great prayer, so that you are not making this decision alone, but with the support of servants of Holy Mother Church, our Virgin Mother, and our Heavenly Father, I entrust the decision to you. Listen to the doctors in their medical expertise, but remember that the Catholic way of looking at death and dying, life and its*

*meaning, biology and the body might be very different from the scientific mind of doctors. Do not let them make the decision for you about my care or my life. That is your responsibility that I am entrusting to you and not them. Once you make a decision, with the aid of God through prayer and the sacraments, stand firm in that decision. I entrust the decision to you, not them.*

*If we are found in the circumstances for which I am writing this letter to you because of the negligence of another person, i.e. a drunk driver, or if I am the victim of an assailant, please, do everything in your power to forgive them immediately and unconditionally. Remember and hold close to your heart the words Christ taught us when the apostles asked him how to pray. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (The Lord's Prayer). Devote a rosary or some other devotion in their name, preferably one which invokes our Holy Mother Mary and her companions, the Saints. Ask God to forgive them for their actions. Nothing would hurt me more than to know that you sought vengeance in my name. I have tried throughout my life to forgive, and carry on a magnanimous spirit daily. Please do the same with regards to anyone who has hurt me, and in doing so has hurt you. Furthermore, do everything in your power to see that they receive merciful treatment from the justice*

*system. For Christ also called us to mercy. Preaching to the people he said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). The heavens will rejoice at your actions and if I am blessed enough to join our Heavenly Father in heaven, I too will rejoice. This may be the most difficult thing that I ask of you to do, but it must be done. Do not endanger your own relationship with God by holding hatred in your heart. If you have any hate, it is as if you have already committed murder (Matthew 5:22), and you will have allowed the evil actions of another person to pull you down into the darkness of evil itself. If God grants me entrance into His kingdom, know that I will pray for you that you may have the strength to do this. If I am still alive, know that God will honor my prayers that you be granted the strength and courage to follow my wishes in this regard.*

*Please, if anyone can benefit from tragedy, especially from organ and tissue donation, know that I desire this to be done. But please remember to make the decision to remove life support on your own, and not because of the coaxing of doctors. Hastening my death in order to harvest organs is not justifiable; do not put yourselves in a state of sin because of pressure from a doctor. By God's grace and guidance, you will know when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate to remove life support. Again, it is vital that you rely on the*

*sacraments and wisdom of our Catholic faith. They will direct you in the way of God, and will not lead you astray. They will give you the strength and courage to make the tough decisions. I know if you rely on the teachings of our faith, the decisions you make will be the right ones. Have no regrets. Trust in Him.*

*Above all, never give in to any temptation, out of mercy or love, to hasten my natural end (death). Euthanasia is never permitted under any circumstance. In doing so, you may prevent me from living out the final demands that God has placed on me in my vocation. My death, as all Catholic deaths, should be a witness to our faith in Christ, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Do not deny me a Catholic death, just as you would never have considered denying me a Catholic life. Be faithful to the teachings of the Church and you cannot err. Seek guidance from God's servants, His priests. Rely on each other, you, my family. Draw closer to one another, in union with the Father's love, so that in tragedy, you may take the opportunity to recommit yourselves to the life of faith, and to transform the world according to the call of our Savior.*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as always before, so now and ever more. Amen.*

Into Your Hands Lord



Love

Finally, I leave you with a short reflection on love. The end of life offers us an opportunity to express and understand the meaning of love in a profound way. I hope this companion has been helpful. Remember to continually avail yourself of the sacraments of the Church as you continue through this journey towards death and into new life:

Love demands sacrifice. To give of one's whole self for the sake of another; that is true love. We have been lured into thinking that love is nothing but an emotion or desire which we cannot or should not refuse, or ignore, if we are to find happiness. This is a decrepit vision of love, as passive and static, out of our control. The truth is, love IS a choice, love IS action. We do choose whom we fall in love with. We do choose whom we love and how we love. Love is sacrifice. It is our willing the greatest good for another, not above our own good, but in relation to it. It is dynamic, and active. It is encouraged by desire, not ruled by it. It is not always easy, but it is worth the struggle. It is worth the pain that often comes with making difficult choices, out of love, for love. We should not want to have it any other way.

God's Peace be with you!

## About the Author

Mark A. Schmidt is a lifelong Catholic dedicated to understanding the depth and beauty of Holy Mother Church and helping others approach Her in an engaging and personal way. Mark has worked as a hospice chaplain, a campus minister, a community organizer, a camp counselor, and a classroom counselor for youth serving court ordered community treatment. He has also been an active volunteer firefighter since the year 2000 and is a certified fire instructor.

He holds undergraduate degrees in Social Work, History, and Honors from Loras College ('05) in Dubuque, Iowa. He also has a Master of Social Work from St. Ambrose University('08) in Davenport, Iowa. His academic studies then guided him to Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology where he earned a Master of Arts in Catholic Thought and Life ('10) which focused on the history, scripture, philosophy, and theology of the Catholic Church.

He has other books including a fictional book titled "Wolves at the Door," and a book in development for understanding and evangelizing Catholic Social Teaching.

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