



DIOCESE OF
SHREWSBURY

Press Release from the Diocese of Shrewsbury

Thursday 26th June 2014

For immediate release:

There is no compassion in the false mercy of assisted suicide

A Bill to legalise assisted suicide may inadvertently lead to the deaths of large numbers of vulnerable people, the Bishop of Shrewsbury will warn the faithful in a pastoral letter to the Catholics of his Diocese this weekend.

The Rt Rev. Mark Davies will say that Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill, due to receive its Second Reading in the House of Lords on July 18, will diminish the legal protection for some of the weakest members of society.

He will warn the faithful that it will be "impossible to predict" the unforeseen consequences of such a change in the law, adding that "in 1967, the politicians who legalised the killing of unborn children in limited and exceptional circumstances did not foresee how violating the sanctity of human life would lead to the wanton destruction of millions of lives".

It is "incomprehensible", Bishop Davies will say, that politicians are considering a law which will diminish the protection of the aged and seriously ill at a time when there has been such widespread concern about the ill-treatment of patients and residents in some of the country's hospitals and care homes.

His letter will be read out at Masses throughout the Diocese of Shrewsbury over the weekend of Sunday June 29, the Feast of the Apostles Ss Peter and Paul.

Bishop Davies will remind the faithful that amid the bloodshed of the 20th century the popes, the Successors of St Peter, stood consistently at the forefront of the defence of human life and of the value of every human person.

Following the D-Day commemorations, Bishop Davies will recall Britain's struggle in the Second World War and will say that defending the sanctity of human life against today's "culture of death" represents the "great battle of our lifetimes" and will urge the faithful, like St Paul, to persevere in this battle "to the finish".

Bishop Davies will say: "Next month a Bill to legalize 'assisted suicide' for those at the end of life will begin its passage through Parliament. This legislation will be presented as a 'compassionate' measure, whose sole aim is to relieve the suffering of the sick and the aged. Yet, it is far from compassionate to remove the legal protections provided for some of the most vulnerable members of society. The proposed change to our laws will license doctors to supply lethal drugs to assist the deaths of those expected to live for six months or less. If Parliament allows exceptions to the laws which protect the very sanctity of human life it is

impossible to predict where this will end. In 1967, the politicians who legalised the killing of unborn children in limited and exceptional circumstances did not foresee how violating the sanctity of human life would lead to the wanton destruction of millions of lives. It is not surprising that many vulnerable people, including those with disabilities, are today worried by Lord Falconer's 'assisted dying' Bill. It might sound reasonable to speak of 'choices at the end of life' - as the campaigners for euthanasia do - but what choice will be left for many?"

The full text of the pastoral letter of Bishop Davies follows

For further information

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Recent photographs of Bishop Davies are available for download by newspapers and media websites (courtesy of the Diocese of Shrewsbury) here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/106338846@N08/>

Pastoral letter of Bishop Davies in full:

A PASTORAL LETTER

On the Great Challenge for our Generation

**To be read at Mass in all the churches and chapels of the Diocese on the Solemnity of
Sts. Peter & Paul, 29th June 2014**

My dear brothers and sisters,

I write to you on the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, when we hear in the Gospel the great promise of Our Lord to Simon Peter:

"You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18).

The past century has been marked by the emergence of inhuman ideologies and such unprecedented bloodshed and destruction that it often seemed as if "*the gates of hell*" had prevailed. However, the Successors of St Peter in the Holy See of Rome have stood at the forefront of the defence of human life, the defence of the value of every human person. They have proclaimed the Gospel of Life in the face of what Saint John Paul II described as, "*the culture of death*". Today, that culture of death is manifested in the hidden destruction of the unborn on an industrial scale, and the threat to the sick and the aged of a killing, which its advocates perversely call "*mercy*."

Pope Francis continues this unfailing witness in our time, by his words and gestures affirming the eternal value of every human being, especially the weakest and the frailest. In his most recent Exhortation, the Holy Father asks us to be attentive to the new forms of poverty and vulnerability. Pope Francis specifically speaks of those elderly people

“who are increasingly isolated and abandoned” and of the unborn children *“the most defenceless and innocent among us”* (Evangeliu Gaudium n. 210, 213).

I don't need to remind you of the widespread concern about the ill-treatment of the aged and those at the end of life in some of our care homes and hospitals - and this in spite of the many dedicated people working in these fields of care. It seems all the more incomprehensible, then, that we would be considering a change in the law to diminish the protection given to those most vulnerable.

Next month a Bill to legalize *“assisted suicide”* for those at the end of life will begin its passage through Parliament. This legislation will be presented as a *“compassionate”* measure, whose sole aim is to relieve the suffering of the sick and the aged. Yet, it is far from compassionate to remove the legal protections provided for some of the most vulnerable members of society. The proposed change to our laws will license doctors to supply lethal drugs to assist the deaths of those expected to live for six months or less. If Parliament allows exceptions to the laws which protect the very sanctity of human life, it would be impossible to predict where this will end. In 1967, the politicians who legalised the killing of unborn children in limited and exceptional circumstances did not foresee how violating the sanctity of human life would lead to the wanton destruction of millions of lives. It is not surprising that many vulnerable people, including those with disabilities, are today worried by Lord Falconer's *“assisted dying”* Bill. It might sound reasonable to speak of *“choices at the end of life”* - as the campaigners for euthanasia do - but what choice will be left for many?

The recent commemorations of D-day have reminded us of how an earlier generation was ready to face death in the defence of human life and dignity, in what Britain's war-time Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, described as a battle for the survival of *“Christian civilisation”* (House of Commons, 18th June 1940). It is the Christian faith which has led us to recognise the sanctity of every human life, the value of every human person. In their quest for the elusive definition of *“British values”*, our political leaders need look no further for the foundations of our society. And whilst we recall the heroism of generations before us, we must not fail to recognise the great challenge for our own generation. We are now being called upon to defend the sanctity of human life amidst the growing threats against it.

Defending the value of the life and dignity of every human person, from their conception until their natural death, represents the great battle of our life-times, a battle we must fight with the weapons of peace. Together with Pope Francis, the Successor of the Apostle Peter, may you and I be able finally to repeat the words of the Apostle Paul:

“I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith ...” (II Tim 4:7).

May it be so, for each one of us.

With my blessing,

+ **Mark**

Bishop of Shrewsbury

Notes to editors:

The Diocese of Shrewsbury covers the parts of Merseyside south of the River Mersey, the southern parts of Greater Manchester, parts of Derbyshire, almost all of the county of Cheshire and all of Shropshire.

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