

RIGHT TO LIFE...RIGHT TO DIE? A few months ago, I was teaching a religion class to a group of fourth graders. The class was covering the Ten Commandments. I told the kids that the Ten Commandments are not the "Ten Suggestions!" Rather, these commandments are God's rules for us in this life. Just the way we have rules and laws in every aspect of our society, so too when it comes to our faith. One of the questions that the children brought up was suicide. They understood that suicide was taking one's own life which is never permissible. I asked them what commandment dealt with that issue and they all replied, "Thou Shall Not Kill" which of course is the Fifth Commandment. Maybe it's good for all of us to go back and review those commandments from time to time. In line with this, last week, we had a very interesting presentation by Ed Mechmann and Sr. Lucy from the Family Life Office here in the Archdiocese. The presentation dealt with the assisted suicide bill that is pending before the New York legislature-"The Patient Self Determination Act." This new legislation would allow doctors to legally prescribe lethal drugs at the request of a person who is terminally ill. Proponents of the bill tell us that this is really a basic human right so that people can "Die with dignity." But as Mr. Mechmann pointed out so well in his talk, if this legislation were enacted it would wreak havoc on our society. Among the reasons to oppose the assisted suicide bill is that first of all, there is no screening for depression involved. Many people who are facing a terminal diagnosis are indeed depressed! Secondly, a terminal diagnosis is hard to predict and as we know, doctors have been wrong before. Finally, while doctors are under oath to positively "Do no harm" to any of their patients, the legislation effectively turns doctors into killers and sends the message that suicide is acceptable! The Catechism of the Church puts it this way: "Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. We are stewards, not owners of the life God has entrusted to us, and it is not ours to dispose of." One of mankind's greatest temptations from the very beginning of time is to want to "play God." The truth is that none of us is God; we are creatures, finite and limited. It seems now that in our country, from both spectrums on our human journey, the natural law is being flouted. At the start of life a woman has the "Right to Choose" to terminate the pre-born baby in her womb through abortion. And now at the end of life, some people in our country are opting for the "Right to Die." After all, we live in a throwaway society. If life becomes burdensome or painful to us, why can't we throw that away too? It seems to me that the "Patient Self Determination Act" opens the door to a lot of questions and perhaps abuses. It could be said that we are heading down a slippery slope in our country morally speaking. When human beings "play God" they tend to make judgements about what lives might be of more "value" than others. In this regard, what about all those people with severe handicaps and disabilities? As a priest for over twenty five years, I have been at the bedside of many dying persons and given them the last sacraments. Very often a good hospice team is on hand to provide comfort and pain relief to the dying person in their last days of life. All human life is a sacred and precious thing given to us by Almighty God. May we never contradict or interfere in the Creator's loving plan and design!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome