

It's nice to see you all again. I had a good week in Vancouver attending the meeting of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. The weather was beautiful. Our hotel sat right across the street from a bay that opens onto the Pacific Ocean. We had easy access to miles of shoreline, beach, and bicycle paths. I got to walk along the shore for about an hour almost every day. We actually got some work done too, but it was great to step outside in the late afternoon and thank God for another day of life.

At the same time, we were sadly aware that the weather was not so favorable in other parts of the world, where people had to flee their homes for fear of hurricanes. And some people don't need bad weather to have a bad day. They face serious illness or other circumstances that make it hard to thank God for another day of life. In the most extreme cases, when death is coming, but suffering is prolonged, some people even think about ending it all. Catholics sometimes ask, "Is it wrong to pray for death to come?" You may pray for death to take its course, but you must not take actions that directly bring it about.

Last week Pope Benedict visited the shrine of Lourdes in France. One hundred fifty years ago, our Lady appeared to a girl named Bernadette, and a spring of water there miraculously rose from the earth. To this day, pilgrims flock to Lourdes to pray for healing, and many cures have happened at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pope Benedict celebrated mass at Lourdes last week and administered the sacrament of anointing the sick. He brought a message of hope with these words: "I would like to say, humbly, to those who suffer and to those who struggle and are tempted to turn their backs on life: turn towards Mary! Within the smile of the Virgin lies mysteriously hidden the strength to fight against sickness and for life. With her, equally, is found the grace to accept without fear or bitterness to leave this world at the hour chosen by God." The media focused on this statement because Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland all have legal means of ending life at the hour chosen by the patient through euthanasia. As Catholics we believe that life comes from God, so it is not ours to end. We may not morally take a lethal cocktail to hasten the hour of death, but we can pray for death to come soon – at the hour chosen by God.

Saint Paul had some of these feelings. At the beginning of his Letter to the Philippians he says, "I long to depart this life and be with Christ." For Paul, he could not lose whether he continued living or died soon. He said, "To me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose." Paul was open to dying, but he was willing to live if it benefited the people he served.

As the November election draws closer, Bishop Finn of our diocese and Archbishop Naumann from Kansas City in Kansas have co-authored a statement encouraging Catholics to vote from a moral point of view. Respect for human life is central to us, respect from womb to tomb. As we are grateful for our life, let us promote causes for life in our homes and at the polls. By word and deed let us spread the good news that to us, life is Christ.