

Funerals are one of the most important ministries a parish can offer. I'm grateful to all here who support the bereaved, especially Alice Obarski from our staff, our deacons who lead the wake services, the funeral choir, the cooks who feed the mourners after the service, and the altar servers who give up a couple hours of school. I cannot tell you all how often, how completely, and how sincerely family members have extended their thanks to the St. Regis community for its support during these traumatic times.

A death in the family is always difficult, whether or not you're expecting it. Often people feel completely helpless. A family member, a close friend is dying, and there's nothing anyone can do. They cannot stop the approach of death. Other people are given more power than they want. The medical staff may ask you, shall we put this person on life support? Or shall we take this person off life support? No one wants to face those decisions alone. It's extremely important that each of us tells our family or closest friends what kind of care we want when death is near. If there is no reasonable help for a meaningful life, do you want a ventilator? Do you want nutrition? What does "reasonable help" mean to you? What does "a meaningful life" mean to you? We need to know these things. My mother says when the time comes to put her on life support, put her in a wheelchair instead and roll her off the nearest cliff. That's a form of euthanasia the rest of the family does not support, but it gives us a place to start the conversation.

Our church teaches we do not need to preserve life at all costs. We may discontinue medical procedures that are extraordinary, burdensome, dangerous, or disproportionate to the expected outcome; we need not be 'over-zealous' in treatment. That's not causing death; that's accepting our inability to stop it. The decisions should be made by the patient or, if he or she is not competent, by those legally entitled to act for the patient. The reasonable will of those people and their legitimate interests must always be respected. You may be called on to make some tough decisions for a family member who is dying. But you will have the support of your church.

St. Paul says everything we believe is built on one belief, the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen, there is no life after death, there is no God who raises the dead, there is no faith, no preaching, no forgiveness. The whole house of cards is built on one belief. But Paul felt confident because he saw the risen Christ, and so had many others. Christ is risen, the dead shall be raised, and the power of death shall pale before the power of God.

We may feel helpless when someone is dying, but we're not. We can help with our belief. We believe that our lives belong to God, and when we die, we go home. We don't have to fight death; Christ has already done that, and death lost. Death is now our friend, who brings us home to God.