

16th Sunday (B)

19th July 2015

‘Once again — write to the MP!’

Jer 23: the remnant of my flock I myself will gather ...
my Shepherd

Eph 2: *He is the peace between us*

Mk 6: 30–34: *they were like sheep without a shepherd*

Ps 22: The Lord is

Our Archbishop, Cardinal Vincent, has written to all the Catholics of Westminster this week. He is asking us to act urgently and in accordance with our duty as Christians, to uphold once again in our land the right to life. We know that human life is sacred from the moment of conception, as human life is immortal and each person’s soul is unique, created by God. So that, whilst we are not wrong to kill animals as necessary — to eat meat; to cull wild animals when their numbers become problematic; to put down an animal which is sickly or dying — this we *cannot* do to one another, to people. It is the basis of the 5th commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” And this is the basis of our conviction that euthanasia is utterly wrong, and a devastating crime against God, the life-giver. To take someone’s life, even that of a terminally-ill person, is an offence against them, and against God. Thankfully, so far, Parliament has resisted several times the assault upon the

vulnerable in our society, and we pray that it will do the same later this year when yet another Bill comes before the House of Commons. The urgency of the Cardinal’s appeal to us to contact our MP comes because Parliament begins its ‘summer recess’ this Wednesday, and will not sit again until 7th September, only 4 days before the debate on the Bill.

We hear a lot from various British campaigners and celebrities about the so-called ‘right to die.’ Over the years a number of challenges have been made in our courts, to try and force the law to declare that assisting the killing of the terminally ill is not a crime. Such challenges have never succeeded, and indeed those who campaigned have had deaths that — whilst at relatively young ages — still utilized the best palliative care and hospice facilities the country has. The campaigner, Diane Pretty, died of motor-neurone disease in 2002, two weeks after the European Court affirmed that there was not any ‘right to die’ that included deliberate killing. At the time, her doctor at the Luton hospice said that her death was “perfectly normal,

natural and peaceful.” Terry Pratchett, the fantasy author, who also campaigned for a change in the law, died earlier this year after several years suffering with dementia — but it was reported at the time of his death that “his death was entirely natural and unassisted, even though he had said in the past he wanted to go at a time of his own choosing.”

Now, no-one would wish a difficult terminal illness on anyone, but the fact is, that with the right love and care of close family and friends, with the expertise and palliative-care medicine in our NHS and Hospices, one’s end can be made as bearable as possible. How we treat others is important, and the gentle, loving accompaniment of those who are dying is very different from agreeing to put them to death with a lethal injection, as we might a sick dog. We may each have to cope with difficult illnesses later in life — ourselves or our loved ones — but, as the slogan has it, we should be offered “*Care Not Killing.*”

It is important that we make it abundantly clear that we do not want Great Britain to become a country where we kill off the terminally ill or vulnerable in our society —

under any circumstances whatsoever. So, I urge you to take your Newsletters home today, and read the pink ‘insert’ leaflet I have provided. It includes the letter from His Eminence the Cardinal; two sides of questions and answers; and a suggested, simple letter to be sent to our MP, Charles Walker. I was encouraged last year when he wrote a reply to a previous letter I had sent him on this matter of euthanasia. He said that, based on a situation very close to him, in his family, he was “nervous about the concept of assisted dying.” He went on to say that he had seen that the drawn-out care offered to one dying parent by the other had been, in their own estimation “the most life-affirming time of their 38yrs together.” Based on such reflections, I have hope that our MP would vote against the September bill, but we still need to bolster this with our own campaigning. Please write Mr Walker an e-mail via the Bishops’ Conference website, or send him a personal letter, preferably this week. The pink sheet has the details.

Let’s not fail the Lord in our defence of life — it’s our Christian duty to uphold the sanctity of human life.