



When Life Ends

At the end of the Liturgical Year, many of the homilies were about preparing for the inevitable reality of one's own death. We need to be practical about how we want our last requests to be fulfilled.

A legal will can let our families know what our final wishes are. Be very careful about filling out a so called "living will" in that many of the pre-written ones that are given out by medical institutions do not provide options that respect a Catholic approach for one to die a natural death. Rather than utilizing a "living will" it is preferable to name a person to be your "power of attorney for healthcare decisions." Be certain to explain to this person that in case of your being incapacitated that they follow your decisions based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. This is especially important in regard to not having water and food withheld. To die from intentional dehydration and starvation is not a natural death but an act of euthanasia, a practice condemned by our Catholic Faith (Fifth Commandment).

The family should know to call a priest for the Last Rites, (confession, anointing and holy communion). A priest can bestow the Apostolic Blessing or Pardon to forgive the dying of all their sins, mortal and venial as well as all temporal punishments that are a consequence of sin.

You may wish to consider including in your will provisions for having Masses prayed for the repose of your soul. The more specific the instructions, the more easily they can be carried out, e.g., at which Catholic parish or institution the Masses should be prayed.

The death of a loved one is often a difficult time but it can be made easier for the surviving family members when the funeral has been planned before the death. The family wants their loved one to have the music, readings, food, burial and so many other details the way they would want it. Having a conversation with those who will be involved in your funeral and having them go to the funeral home with you is a good idea. This gives everyone the assurance the last things will be done appropriately.

When my son Nicholas died a few years ago I had mentally prepared for it. When he was still a baby he had a tragic accident at the hospital which left him almost completely disabled. I was told he had a 50% chance of living to be seven and a 50% chance of living every seven years after that. He was 17-years-old when he died. On January 7, 2018, he would have been 21.

When he died I knew what funeral home I wanted to use, what food I wanted at the dinner and what music I wanted to play. He loved Shania Twain. At the funeral I sang, "From this Moment," kneeling at the side of his coffin. I sang the song again at his burial. He is my beloved whom I am always close to and who remains close to me in my prayer. Being prepared made his loss easier.