

## REFLECTIONS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Some practical and pastoral reflection for relatives and friends witnessing and accompanying in this way could include considering:

- How might I come to identify in myself any tensions between our own beliefs and convictions and the belief of our sick relative or friend?
- Do I have a space (e.g. a support network, trusted friend, priest or other professional) where I can discuss my reactions to the illness and intentions of my friend or family member in a free and open way?
- In the case of conflicting views, am I still able to love and be present with this person? What might be stopping me from doing this and who can I discuss this with in a way that doesn't inflame any tension with my ill relative/friend?
- Am I giving myself appropriate space and support to ensure my own wellbeing in the call to commit to be present with my relative/friend in their illness?
- Do I have a pastoral care support network myself (e.g. pastoral counsellor, priest, pastoral associate, trusted friend from my faith or parish community)?

- Are there moments in this time where I can be sustained by prayer and meditation on God's word?
- Do I have any questions that I need to ask of the medical team, palliative care team or doctors in order to understand the medical care that will assist my friend/relative at this time?
- Do I have any questions that I need to ask of the pastoral care team, my parish priest or other relatives in order to understand and accept the Church's teaching?
- Are there any factors/unresolved issues that are making it difficult to be present and commit to love this person as a relative/friend? Who might I talk to about these?

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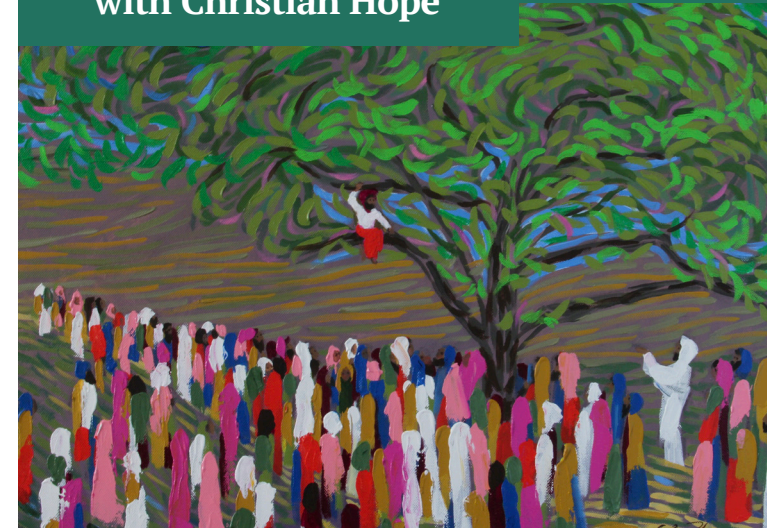


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"Zacchaeus" by Irene Thomas  
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## To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope”



"Zacchaeus" by Irene Thomas

“Christian accompaniment is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ, who reached out to the sick, the outcast and the sinner. He never condoned evil. He did not condemn the wayward, but he always called them to conversion.”

## REFLECTIONS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

To witness and accompany a sick or dying person with Christian hope is an extension of Christ's own witness and ministry.

Jesus reached out to all in a spirit of hope.

There are four elements to accompanying a dying person:

- A **COMMITMENT** to be the patient's companion during the last phase of their life;
- An **UNDERSTANDING** of the medical care that will assist the patient at this time;
- An **UNDERSTANDING** and **ACCEPTANCE** of the Church's teaching about the sacred and intrinsic value of every human life;
- A **READINESS** to provide appropriate forms of pastoral care toward the end of life.

An understanding of the human person is important.

We are not just physical and social, but emotional, spiritual and contextual.

We are made in the image of God as beloved sons and daughters, having dignity and worth.

We live in relationship – in community – with each other, and as such our responses in relationships affect those around us in a variety of ways.

## OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

1

Because of our Christian vision of the human person, we can never accept euthanasia as a morally acceptable option.

We have a responsibility to acknowledge the fundamental dignity of the human person.

2

Your loved one, like other people, will struggle in the face of suffering and illness and this can give rise to feelings of helplessness and isolation, even to the point where their purpose and meaning in life is questioned.

Our Christian response to suffering involves faith: having hope that we are never alone, and that, in fact our deepest moments of suffering are our closest and most profound experiences of the suffering Christ and the mystery of the Cross. Suffering has the ability in the light of faith to transform us and can be a gift of love that is deeply grounded in human reality.

3

At the core of your loved one's heart is a desire (acknowledged or not) to be touched by the comfort, consolation and love of God.

To accompany your loved one is to remind them of God's presence with them, and of the mysterious longing for peace and relationship with God.

This deeply consoling peace – which is often described using the Hebrew word *shalom* - requires a listening heart.

But this can take time, and patience is needed. It involves a commitment to walk with your loved one on a journey without necessarily knowing how that journey will unfold.

4

The Church embraces the best of science and medical care in order to relieve the suffering of the sick or dying person.

When this is exhausted because it becomes ineffective or there are unreasonable side-effects, the time will come when death should be allowed to arrive naturally.

The Church continues to advocate for effective palliative care, given that, administered thoughtfully, it supports the Christian vision of the human person.

5

It is important that you identify a support person or group who you can talk to about your reactions to the situation in a free and open way.