

LET GOD EXECUTE YOUR LIVING WILL!

Today's Text: Lk 10: 25- 28

Extracts:

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested [Jesus], saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” [Lk 10: 25-28]

A living will is a legal document that a person (the declarant) uses to make known to his/her health care providers and family members (the executors) his/her wishes regarding life-prolonging medical treatments.¹ It describes life-prolonging treatments that declarants want in the event they either suffer from a terminal illness or are in a permanent vegetative state. The will becomes effective only when the declarant is incapacitated. In practice, however, a living will is difficult to execute because it may take more than medical opinion to decide that an affected declarant is in deed incapacitated.² The declarant's desire may be in conflict with the professional ethics of the care givers. The whole matter may even take on a national political debate, as in the case of Terri Schiavo, a Floridian woman who was on life support for years (1999-2005).³ Therefore, a living will may never be executed to the satisfaction of the declarant.

There is a better and easier way to go about it! Doctors and care givers are mere humans who cannot create or give life. Only God knows who is dead or alive. So, why don't you go to Him who can best execute your living will? In this week's study, a lawyer came to Jesus to ask how he could gain eternal life. Jesus recommended to him the content of the living will that he should make that God would gladly execute for him at the appropriate time. I am sure you are quite interested to know more about it!

¹ Rebecca Berlin, “What is a living will?”

http://www.alllaw.com/articles/wills_and_trusts/article7.asp

² See, for example, Scott Sagaria, “Trial Continues In Case Involving Woman Whose Living Will Was Not Followed By Her Doctor And Nursing Home Staff,”

http://www.californiaestateplanninglawyerblog.com/2007/03/trial_continues_in_case_involv.html ; March 7, 2007

³ <http://www.answers.com/topic/terri-schiavo-medical-patient>

1. Jesus teaches a lawyer how to prepare his living will!

People prepare living wills for a variety of reasons. The most common may be for religious or personal desires. For example, some people may not want their bodies to be unduly put on life-prolonging gadgets when it is quite obvious that they are already dead. Instead, they would want the gadgets disconnected as soon as possible. On the other hand, there are other people who are pro-life who believe that a miracle can still occur even when people are brain-dead, that no human being should have the right to determine matters of life and death without exhausting all the options. In the end, no matter what people have declared in their living wills, there is always a controversy.

Perhaps the debate should be at the spiritual, not physical level. People know that one day they are going to die. However, they do not know when, where or how. If you were to find yourself in such a dilemma, what would be the best living will that you should go for? I would prefer the one that covers my hereafter and not worry about my corpse which is soon going to decay any way! I would be concerned with where I was going to spend my eternity- in heaven or hell? Therefore, my living will should focus there. Before my death, I would make a declaration to God to let Him know my heart's desire to spend eternity with Jesus in His kingdom. Since, "no one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man, who is in heaven" [Jn 3: 13], I would certainly ask Jesus to tell me heaven's requirements for me to put in my living will. Thereafter, I would worry less about death and focus on living!

In this week's Bible text, an audacious young lawyer came to Jesus and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to *inherit eternal life*?" [Lk 10: 25]. In other words, he came with an arrogant air, as someone who already knew what he wanted. He was learned (that is what we call lawyers!). Is that not the attitude that most of us have in matters of life and death? In the prime of our lives and professional achievements, we behave as if we have all the answers to life's challenges. We have already conquered the world. Death and hardship are in the distant future, things we read or hear about but never experience.

Jesus threw the matter back to him by asking him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" [v. 26]. Jesus was referring to the Law of Moses which every Jew of that lawyer's standing should know. Without even thinking about it, the lawyer (who was expert in that law) answered Jesus [v. 27]:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

He quoted from Deuteronomy 6: 5, a text that was recited twice a day by every faithful Jew, and Leviticus 19: 18. In essence, the lawyer summarized the central theme of ethical conduct under the Law of Moses. That he could quote it so

eloquently did not mean that he also practised it. So Jesus said to him, “You have answered rightly; *do this and you will live*” [v. 28]. Instead of thanking Jesus and going ahead to do as he had been advised, the arrogant lawyer shot back at Jesus, saying, “And who is my neighbor?” [v. 29]. In our self-righteous impudence, that is exactly what we would also have said! You will almost hear yourself saying, “Jesus’ prescription is not for me but for the rest of you who are not born-again!”

We shall take up Jesus’ answer to the man in next week’s study. For now, let us pay attention to those words of Jesus, “Do this and you will live.” The Lord has given the *true believer* the building blocks of the living will that is acceptable to God. It talks about our *love* for God and for our neighbours. It talks about the *intensity* of that love. That implies the *unswerving faithfulness of the total person* (heart, soul, strength and mind) *to God and neighbours*.

The Scriptures give us the following description of love [1 Cor. 13: 4-7]:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

When you apply love so defined to your relationship with God, it means that you rank Him over and above everything else. To do otherwise is idolatry, the issue covered in the first four of the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20: 1-11]. Love for your neighbours is defined by complete faithfulness to your spouse and other neighbours, as covered in the remaining six commandments [vv. 12- 17].

Here are some implications of the totality of love as defined above:

- ***It goes beyond mere mechanical compliance.*** It is measured by its fruits. Both the letter and the spirit count. You cannot get away on a technicality. For example, the moment you lust in your heart after another woman (man) not your wife (husband), you have already committed adultery with her (him) [Matt. 5: 27-28]. Writing to the Thessalonians on the issue of purity, Paul said [1 Thes. 4: 3-8]:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust... because the Lord is the avenger of all such... For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us the Holy Spirit.

That is why the word of God says, “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but *in deed and in truth*” [1 Jn 3: 18].

- ***It is a relationship based on mutual trust.*** There is no relationship that can last if it is not based on mutual trust. Look at marriage or friendship. In a marriage, the husband’s body belongs to his wife and vice-versa [1 Cor. 7: 4]. Since most of us tend to be selfish, that is, loving self more than others, it becomes relatively easy to love your spouse by loving him/her as you love yourself! With respect to friendship, Jesus has described it so effectively this way: “This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*” [Jn 15: 12-14]. God called Abraham His friend [Is. 41: 8] because he was ready to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in full obedience to God’s command. Was it not God that first gave us His only begotten Son?
- ***Love actually means total obedience to God!*** Jesus told His disciples, “My Father loves Me because I lay down My life, that I may take it again” [Jn 10: 17]. John the apostle adds, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us” [1 Jn 4: 12]. Therefore, when you are challenged to love your enemy, do it *because* God has commanded you to do so [Matt. 5: 44-45]!

In sum, God requires you to trust Him to make the best after-life choices for you. The only condition for Him to do that is for you to *totally* love Him and your neighbour *on His terms*.

2. A profile of your current living will

Now that you have heard from Jesus, how do you see your living will and how much adjustment do you need to make to make it conform to what God can execute on your behalf? Your profile could be one of the following (among others):

- a) *You may have been a mere humanist!*

There are some people who will not hesitate to give up their lives or convenience for others. They could be very generous and most helpful. They are humble and respectful in their relationship with others. However, some of such people do not believe in God or in the hereafter! They may believe in reincarnation or contend that life ends when they die. Their sense of right or wrong is shaped by the world, not by divine prescription or inspiration. People with such a living will can be called humanists. They do not care what happens to them when they die.

If you were in God's place, how would you execute a humanist's living will when s(he) dies? The word of God says, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" [1 Cor. 13: 3]. It adds that the "unbelieving" [among others] shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" [Rev. 21: 8]. Therefore, it is not enough to claim that you love your neighbours unless it is derived from your fear and worship of the true God. You can only define right and wrong in an absolute sense when you accept the supremacy of a higher authority that is knowable and known through His only begotten Son, Jesus.

If you find yourself in this situation, all you need to do is to give up your foolishness [Ps. 14: 1] and accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour so that He can introduce you to His Father as His adopted brother or sister [Rom. 8: 15-17].

b) *Or you may have been a mere sky-gazer!*

Some people are so focussed on heaven (as defined in their religion) that they forget that they are still on earth! In the name of upholding God's laws, they inflict untold hardships on those they believe are not doing God's will their own way. They only show love to people who share their views but persecute the rest, in most cases, unjustly. Such persecution can take the form of discrimination in appointments, promotion or political support. For example, take the more than forty-two Jews who banded themselves together and conspired to kill Paul for daring to preach Jesus. They took an oath that they would eat nothing until they had killed him. They were devout practitioners of the Law of Moses! Happily, Paul's nephew (his sister's son) overheard it and reported the matter to the Roman guards [Acts 23: 11-16].

Again, the word of God says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" Such people can be called mere sky-gazers. What they see when they look up or raise their hands in prayer to heaven is the mere sky, hardly God's heaven! Their living will does not contain what it takes for Jesus to recommend them to His Father for mercy in His kingdom. So, if you find yourself in this situation, admit your error and recognize that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentiles, slave nor free, male nor female for they "are all one in Christ" [Gal. 3: 28].

c) *Or you may have been a clever hypocrite!*

Some people are excellent with their public religious practices. They do not miss any worship services. They pay their tithes and offerings quite

regularly. In public, they are seen as good role models. However, when you scratch beyond the surface, you will be discouraged. They only keep the non-existent 11th Commandment, “Thou shalt not be caught!” They engage in immoral and other corrupt practices. They only do charity if they can get maximum publicity out of it. They are behind all the gossips and character-assassination plots in the congregation, office or family. They insist on tradition, even when it transgresses the commandment of God, as long as it benefits them [**Matt. 15: 3**].

Speaking of hypocrites in relation to the Pharisees, Jesus quoted from the book of Isaiah which says, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” [**vv. 7-9; Is. 29: 13**]. Look at the attitude of the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray. He was said to trust in himself while despising others. He stood in the temple and prayed, thus, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector [praying some distance from him!]. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess” [**Lk 18: 9-13**].

That kind of living will cannot be executed by God to the benefit of the declarant; it is a clear desire to be confined to hell fire. If you find yourself in this situation, learn to be humble by esteeming others better than you are and by looking out not only for your own interests but those of others [**Phil. 2: 3-4**].

3. Conclusion: Jesus is your living will!

Nobody can make eternity in heaven by own effort because we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God [**Rom. 3: 23**]. That is why we all rely on the grace of Jesus Christ who has shed His blood to give us direct access to His Father. He is our Advocate before the Father [**1 Jn 2: 1**]. Since He is the only one who can effectively make your case before God, let Him prepare your living will.

In fact, make Jesus your living will, the Saviour that God gave because He so loved the world [**Jn 3: 16-17**]. So, when God sees the blood of Jesus on you on the day you die, it becomes easy for Him to execute your living will of eternal life in your favour.