

Archbishop Smith: Beware of Ice!

Edmonton has been in a very deep freeze this past week. One day in the midst of it my car registered -34°C. as the external temperature. That does not factor in the further chilling effects of the wind. As I drove along, my car issued a warning: "Ice possible." Oh. Really? Thanks. Too bad the other drivers trying to navigate (at times unsuccessfully) some very slick streets and hills hadn't been warned that deep cold and slippery ice just might go together.

Clearly, that was an unnecessary warning. Only the willfully blind and deaf would have refused to see the slippery conditions and ignored the many warnings blaring out from radios and televisions and other media across the city.

For the last few years, the Church and many others in Canada have been calling out "Ice possible!" in another context. When the legalization of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) and euthanasia was being contemplated in Canada, purportedly for only highly circumscribed instances, the warning went out that allowing it even for a few limited cases would inevitably create a slippery slope toward expanding eligibility to a broad range of circumstances. Ice possible!

Well, that ice has now clearly taken hold, and at astonishing speed. On September 11, 2019 the Superior Court of Quebec ruled unconstitutional the requirement that death be "reasonably foreseeable" before euthanasia/PAS would be permitted. The federal government has chosen not to challenge this. Instead, it has accepted the ruling and is preparing to adjust national legislation accordingly. In addition, it has announced further legal reviews this year that will consider allowing for advance requests and expansion of euthanasia/PAS to mature minors and people who request to have their death hastened solely due to mental illness. Not only is the slope slippery, but also it feels as if we are being pushed down it. Yes, government is seeking to be consultative on these matters with surveys and reviews. Yet the questionnaire currently circulated does not even ask if one is opposed to these practices in principle. It presupposes acquiescence to the status quo, yet it is precisely the status quo that must be challenged. By precluding any fundamental objection to euthanasia/PAS procedures in the first place, it appears that the consultation is being used as a means for 'going forward,' or broadening scope.

It is vitally important that we continue to speak out against not only the expansion of assisted suicide and euthanasia in our country but also their very existence. This is why the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories have issued a new pastoral letter on this issue, and why other Bishops across the country are calling on their people to make their voices heard.

The ice that has accumulated on our medical and legal highways is very slippery right now, and has citizens already crashing into one another. The heedlessness

of danger seems to be wilful, so I expect the perilous conditions to be with us long after the spring thaw lifts the other ice from our streets. Therefore, let us remain both vigilant and vocal in witness to the dignity and sanctity of every human life from beginning to natural end.