

## UTILITARIANISM

I have a nephew who was born forty-eight years ago just three weeks after my mother died. He was born with Spina Bifida. At that time there were no scans during pregnancy that could predict such a condition so it came as a great shock. The doctors told his parents it was hopeless and he had only days to live and should be left at hospital to die peacefully. My sister told them if he was going to die, she would take him home, care for him and he would die in her arms at home. Joe is still alive and throughout his life has never let his disability hold him back. He has been a great source of inspiration to me and the whole family. He attended the same school as his two brothers, Chester Catholic High School, and attained a place at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. Although he has need of a wheelchair, he also drives a car and has always been in fulltime employment. He is also a talented musician. Some years ago, Joe married a wonderful lady, Stacey, who is also severely disabled. She has been unable to walk since she suffered from a rare disease when she was a teenager. She also is in full employment. They are a wonderful couple and although they have no children of their own, they have nephews and nieces who love them and look up to them almost as parents. I do not like to refer to them as disabled for they have heroically achieved far more than I, who am nearly twice their age, can claim to have achieved in my whole life. I am, at times, inclined to take for granted the graces and blessings that have been bestowed upon us. In the case of Stacey and Joe, their life is one of daily heroism.

Utilitarianism is a word I have only recently come across. I remember utility furniture from when I started work in a furniture shop. That was a scheme introduced during the war to cope with a shortage of raw materials and rationing of their usage. Utilitarianism is a philosophy that dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I think it is one that is destroying our society. I do not have a degree in philosophy nor theology. In fact my only qualifications are a few "O level" passes so, I can only speak from my heart. Briefly, "utilitarianism maintains that the human person has value only inasmuch as they are economically productive and prosperous. The ultimate goal of life, therefore, is to produce so as to acquire, accumulate and possess material things." (Fr. Ed Broom.OMV) Following this philosophy, the child in the womb has no value until it is born whole and healthy; Those who are disabled are a burden to society; those who are past retirement age and can no longer contribute to the economy are not needed and should be encouraged to accept assisted dying. These things are not yet wholly part of our law but there is a strong movement trying to introduce them. To me, this goes against all Christian ethics. There is a strong lobby trying to bring in abortion on demand at any stage up to birth and another to legalise euthanasia. Surely, this is contrary to all that Jesus taught us. He told us to be servants to one another; to give to the poor, heal the sick and to protect the vulnerable.

If Joe had been left to die, what a loss that would have been to the community and to all the people he has served. I believe that every child in a mother's womb has great potential to benefit our society and by terminating its life we are denying the world of that potential. It also leaves a mother with a heart that is broken and a scar that she will carry for the rest of her life. In 1965 in the UK, the death sentence for murder was suspended yet, today, it is legal to terminate the lives of the most innocent and most vulnerable, unborn babies in a mother's womb. Up until I was forced to give up driving, due to a problem with my eyesight, for about thirty years, I served as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion and over the years, took communion to many people who were aged and infirm. They were wonderful characters, full of knowledge and experience. They were people of great faith and powerhouses of prayer. I think they gave me far more than I could give to them. How can these wonderful people be considered a burden?

O Lord, help me to use the talents you gave me to serve those around me.