

Recently, the teacher and spiritual writer Father Ron Rolheiser, OMI, wrote, "...Our lives belong not just to us but also to others. Likewise, our deaths do not belong only to us, but also to our families, our loved ones, and the world. We are meant to give both our lives and our deaths to others as gift. If this is true, then our dying is something that will impart either a gift or a burden to those who know us."

This week we recognize National Healthcare Decision Day, the time of the year to reflect on Advance Care Planning and the opportunity to offer a blessing to our families and loved ones by assuming the burden of our own future healthcare wishes. Advance Care Planning essentially asks us to think about our own healthcare wishes and to discuss them with our loved ones in the event we are unable to make those wishes known in a healthcare emergency. Neglecting to discuss our healthcare wishes with our families and loved ones can often leave family members traumatized, separated, and unnecessarily burdened by the responsibility of making medical decisions that they are perhaps not prepared to make.

The blessing we can offer is by relieving that burden.

The blessing begins with completing two documents, a *Medical Power of Attorney* and a *Directive to Physicians and Family or Surrogates*. These easy-to-complete documents spell out, very clearly, your wishes regarding medical decision making for you if you are unable to make those wishes known yourself, and your wishes regarding life-support treatment in critical health situations.

Then, and this is the most important step, take a moment and discuss your future healthcare wishes with your family and loved ones. For example, if you are diagnosed as terminal or in an irreversible condition and can't make decisions for yourself, do you wish to receive life sustaining treatments like mechanical breathing machines or other similar

treatments? Have a conversation with your family physician about resuscitation if your heart should stop or you should stop breathing.

These are very difficult decisions for family members or loved ones to make in the emotion of an emergency hospital visit. We often default to standard medical treatments with little or no consideration of the patient's wishes. Disagreements among family members in these situations are common. And unfortunately, these disagreements can leave long-lasting scars. By completing Advance Directives, we can remove that burden from our families and allow our life and our death to become a blessing to them.

The God who holds our hand and walks with us along the full length of our journey, gently tells us to "Fear not." Here is our opportunity to walk with our loved ones, hold their hands and, by our example, be a blessing for them, and to "Fear not," because you have removed a heavy burden from their shoulders. It's the most loving thing we can do for our loved ones.

What better time than Easter, when Jesus offered his death as a blessing to us all, to consider these questions.