

## FACING A DILEMMA

The teacher had given each of us several topics from which to choose in order to prepare an essay as part of our course of study. My assignment had to be completed and handed by the end of the week. I had chosen a topic which can be controversial and cause heated arguments. For moral, religious and ethical reasons, people tend to be either passionately for or fiercely against euthanasia.

Euthanasia comes from the Greek and means mercy killing. When I chose to write about that issue an image immediately came to my mind: the opening scene of a Spanish film, "Mar Adentro" ("Deep Into the Sea", in rough translation) , a very touching film based on a true story. The film tells us about a young man who had become tetraplegic after having dived into the shallow end of a pool , thus having broken his neck. As a consequence of that tragic accident the young man was doomed to spend the rest of his life lying in bed, confined to a small room in his house, completely paralyzed, unable even to speak. He could express himself only through winks and blinks, so the strong handsome young man the film showed (in flashback) diving into tragedy now lay immobilized, looking like a decrepit old man, pale, gaunt and in pain.

I remember I was impressed by the quality of that film, especially the performance of the leading actor (Javier Bardem), who played perhaps the most difficult role of his career. An actor's mission is to convey feelings and expressions, but Bardem's character had been physically deprived of expressions, so he was limited to communicating feelings, something he achieved with his eyes only. That film was slow and sad, but there was never a moment of dullness. I remember feeling emotional and sympathetic towards the character played by Bardem, who eventually convinced someone from his family to do him a favor, the ultimate favor of letting him die.

While I was doing some research for my assignment I happened to read some news in *The Guardian* (November 13, 2010) about an English lady, Frances Inglis, who gave her brain-damaged son a lethal injection of heroin to end what was, in her own words, "a living hell". Ms Inglis' son, 22-year-old Thomas Inglis suffered severe head injuries when he fell out of a moving ambulance in July 2007. The case had again been brought to trial and the newspaper reported Ms. Inglis had lost her appeal against conviction on the mercy killing of her son, and she had been sentenced to serve five years in jail. The words of one of the judges were final: "murder is murder whatever the motive." But the judges' decision was not unanimous. Three court of appeal judges reduced the minimum prison term that Ms Inglis must serve from nine years to five, describing it as one of the most difficult sentencing decisions they had to face.

In fact, I would not like to be in a judge's place in a case like that. "Mercy killing is murder," states the law. And all citizens must abide by the law. That seems reasonable, and yet... What would you do if you were in the mother's place? Ms. Inglis, 58, is a mother of three who worked as a carer for disabled children. I underlined that phrase for a reason. Isn't it a bit of cruel irony that a person who makes a living out of caring for disabled children was

now forced by society's laws to stand by and hopelessly watch her own son go through "a living hell" day by day, as she described her son's ordeal? Who is supposed to know better in such a situation - society in general or those who care for the individual directly affected? Who certainly cares most for the person who is still "living", but in excruciating pain - the pious society or the loving mother?

In Ms. Inglis' case, considering her profession, she knew her son had no chance of recovering, and she was convinced that her son's life had to be brought to an end. I thank God for not being a judge, for I do not think I would have the courage of sentencing that lady to spend five years in prison. Maybe the judges are technically right in following strictly what is written in their books, but I certainly sympathize with Ms. Inglis. And again, I thank God for not being in her place, as I probably would not be able to pluck up the courage to deliberately put an end to my son's life. In conclusion, depending on the circumstances, I am in favor of mercy killing, but I hope I will never have to face such a dilemma.