

November 2, 2025

WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

“The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing,” is a famous quote from Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish politician and poet from the 1700’s. The logic in this statement is clear and simple and should be obvious. Sadly, in practice that is not the case. The warning that it suggests can be subtly buried in other variations. There are common expressions that ignore or overlook potential evil. Here are some of them: “It’s not that bad.” That becomes an excuse for behavior that is normally unacceptable, but becomes permitted by slipping it by with this line of thinking. “I seriously doubt that will ever happen.” This too quickly dismisses potential consequences of bad actions. “I’ve never heard of that.” Just because we haven’t heard of something, doesn’t mean it isn’t happening or cannot happen. Each of these has one thing in common, a lack of clarity of thought.

All of that, cloudiness of reasoning and overlooking potential harm, is on display in recent legislation of which many may not even be aware. On September 11, 2025, Governor Murphy signed into law a bill (A4085/S3007) legalizing “natural organic reduction,” commonly known as “human composting.” Rather than traditional burial, this process transforms a human body over time into nutrient rich soil. It sounds innocent, environmentally friendly, and no big deal. Bishop O’Connell and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops has opposed this practice. In a recent statement issued by our Bishop, he clearly says, “it fundamentally conflicts with the Church’s reverence for the human body and it’s teachings on the resurrection of the body. The Church upholds the dignity of the human body, even after death, as a temple of the Holy Spirit, deserving of respectful care. While the Church permits cremation as an acceptable alternative to traditional burial, it insists that the remains be treated with reverence and interred in a sacred place dedicated to prayer and remembrance”

I also believe that this legislation is a symptom of a deeper issue, the gradual and ongoing erosion of respect for the sacredness of life and the human body. This practice, in particular, treats the body of the deceased as merely a commodity, nothing more important than leftovers used for compost. It contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture that man is created in the image and likeness of God, higher than the animal kingdom and the soil from which God made us. As Bishop O’Connell reminds us, this practice is similar to what has sadly become common, the treating of cremated remains of a child of God as nothing more than mementos. Sometimes ashes of the deceased are kept like a knickknack or preserved in jewelry as a keepsake. It all seems innocent and sentimental, but it contributes to a deterioration of the human body as sacred and belonging to God. It is born from a lack of clear thinking and emphasizing only emotions. A failure to be meticulous in our care for the body of the deceased can easily be backed up into a similar lack of care for living human beings. Don’t we see that all the time in the way we treat and talk to one another, not to mention epidemic violence?

This weekend we observe that very beautiful remembrance of all the deceased. It’s a time to mourn them, remember them, honor them and pray for them. The ultimate goal is not to not to discard the remains of our loved ones as compost or to be persevered as a monument. Our destiny is not just earthly, but heavenly. Respect for the dead should translate into respect for the living.

“Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.” (Psalm 23:6)