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Pope Francis greets family members during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vat

Pope Francis greets family members during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Feb. 9, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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**VATICAN CITY —** People have a right to life, not to death, which must be welcomed but never provoked, Pope Francis said.

"The right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritized, so that the weakest, especially the elderly and the sick, are never discarded," he said Feb. 9 during his weekly general audience.

The pope also criticized a problem he said is real for older people "in a certain social class" of not being given all of the medicine or care they need since they lack the money.

"This is inhumane. This is not helping them, this is pushing them more quickly toward death," he said. They must be cared for and not marginalized.

The pope's remarks were part of his series of audience talks about St. Joseph and his role as the patron saint of a "happy" death, a term used to describe a last stage of life that is peaceful and full of faith and hope.

Pope Francis praised a recent comment by retired Pope Benedict XVI, who, at nearly 95 years of age, recognizes his own presence before "the dark door of death."

It is "good advice" for everyone, Pope Francis said, because today's "so-called 'feel-good' culture tries to remove the reality of death." People seek to ignore "our finite existence, deluding ourselves into believing we can remove the power of death and dispel fear."

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the reality of death back into focus, he added, and so many people "have lost loved ones without being able to be near them, and this has made death even harder to accept and process."

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The Christian faith is not about removing the fear of death; "rather, it helps us to face it" with trust in Christ's promises, he said. Christians know for certain, he said, that Christ is risen and "awaits us behind that dark door of death."

"We cannot avoid death, and precisely for this reason, after having done everything that is humanly possible to cure the sick, it is immoral to engage in futile treatment," the pope said, referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church's teachings on the legitimacy of refusing "overzealous" treatment not to cause death but to accept it (paragraph 2278).

When it comes to the experience of death itself, of pain or of suffering, he said, "we must be grateful for all the help that medicine endeavors to give, so that through so-called 'palliative care,' every person who is preparing to live the last stage of their life can do so in the most human way possible."

However, the pope warned against confusing such care with unacceptable interventions that lead to killing people. "We must accompany people toward death,

but not provoke death or facilitate assisted suicide."

This ethical principle, he said, applies to everyone, "not just Christians or believers."

At the end of his main audience talk, the pope reminded people of the church's celebration of the World Day of the Sick Feb. 11. He asked that all people experiencing illness be guaranteed health care and spiritual accompaniment.

He urged people to pray for those who are ill, their families, health care and pastoral workers, and everyone who helps care for their needs.