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JMJ
U.I.O.G.D.
Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls
O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!
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VOL. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Consideration of Our Last End

“None of you asketh me: Whither goest thou?”—St. John 16: 5.

A general and at the same time a rare question. A useless and, at the same time a most important question. It is a general question; for whenever one acquaintance meets another in the street, the first word is: Where are you going to? A rare question; for you seldom find one who asks himself: Where am I going to? It is a useless question when proposed to others; for as a general rule it is prompted by mere curiosity, and deserves no better answer than: What is that to you? It is a most important question when one proposes it to himself; for the answer to it brings before us the most weighty, useful, and fundamental truths of our faith, the neglect of which causes the loss of most souls. Let us consider them for our mutual benefit; and since man consists of two parts, body and soul, I shall propose them in a twofold question and answer, namely:

- I. Whither goest thou? Thy body shall go into the grave.*
- II. Whither goest thou? Thy soul shall go into eternity.*

I. As far as the body is concerned, our proper home is the grave. “My days shall be shortened,” says Job, “and only the grave remaineth for me” (Job 17: 1). Nothing shall remain to me of all the lands I have owned; nothing of all the houses I have lived in; nothing of all the money I have amassed, which has made me so important amongst men; the dark grave is all that I have to expect. Your beautiful dwellings and mansions, oh, rich ones of this world! Do not belong to you, exclaims St. Augustine; “a man is but a guest in

his own house;” he merely takes shelter in it for a short time. But the grave is his true dwelling; of that he can say with certainty that it is his house, for he shall remain in it and it shall belong to him till the last day.

Every day brings us nearer to the grave, and hardly is there one to be found to ask himself: whither am I going? The consequence of this neglect is that we set such a high value on temporal things and think so little of eternity. If we often reflected on this truth seriously and deeply: I am hastening to the grave, should we then plague ourselves so much with disturbing cares and wearisome toil for the sake of the mortal body, or to amass money, or enjoy the pleasures of life? In God’s name, what is the use of such inordinate desires? Imagine that you are looking at a prisoner condemned to death; he thinks of nothing but filling his barns with corn, his cellar with wine; he wants clothes made in the newest fashion; as he is brought to execution he sees a fine house, and asks at once whether it is for sale and what is the price of it, as he wishes to buy it for himself. What would you think of such a man? Would you look on him as a wise man? Oh, fool! You would say to him; do you know where you are going to? To the gallows, to the place of execution, where you will be hung by the neck for an hour. Why, then, do you trouble yourself about fine houses and grand clothes, about corn and wine? Look after your soul, and see what you can do to make it happy in eternity.

Now, all of us are condemned to death. Sentence is already pronounced on us: “It is appointed unto men once to die.” Our life is the way to the place of execution, on which we are really led to death. Our life and body is a building that is eaten away by the rushing river; time constantly gnaws at and undermines the foundation; every moment we live takes away a piece of our lives; every breath we draw forces on another breath, until we come to the last. Thus the beginning of our life is also the beginning of our death.

Yet, although we are every day, hour, moment, hastening to death like condemned criminals; although our house is constantly being undermined by the rushing river and ready to fall; yet the most of us are principally, nay, almost solely occupied by our efforts to adorn and furnish the falling house, to pamper and fatten the body. That we may live comfortably in this house we work from morning till night, amassing money, buying land, building, going to law for the sake of a square foot of ground, as if a little world depended on it; while for the sake of a wretched handful of money our precious souls, God and heaven are freely staked. What arrant fools we are! A heathen philosopher complained of this long ago: “We know,” he says, “that we are mortal and must die; that we are in daily danger of being surprised by death; yet our desires are as great as if we were immortal.” It is not enough for us to have our daily bread, for which Christ taught us to pray, in order to preserve our lives; we wish for superfluities. Nor are we satisfied even with the superfluous; we long for still more. The care for the present day, to which Christ exhorts us, is not enough; we take into account future and uncertain days, weeks, months and years, so that nothing may be wanting to us. Our desires are as great as if we were immortal; we do not think of where we are going; we forget that we are really on the road to death and that we are hurrying to the grave. For what else are you so careful in

nourishing this flesh of yours but to give it to the worms? For whom do you heap up wealth if not for your descendants, to whom you must leave it? Is it not a foolish thing to build in a place in which we cannot remain? To spend so much labor in gathering together what we cannot keep possession of? Whenever you pass by the grave of a rich man, look around and see where are his riches and ornaments, his glory, his vanity, his luxury, his pleasure, or what remains to him of all these things. Nothing remains to him now but ashes, filth and worms. Imagine that you hear a voice from the grave crying out to you, and indeed the silence of the grave is eloquent enough: What you are now, I was; what I am now, you will be.

Yes, we know that we are going to the grave; but the way may be a long one; we may still have many years to pass in this world. Such are the thoughts of most people. They all acknowledge that they must die; hardly one thinks he will die soon. Each one looks at his grave as still many miles, many years distant from him. He who is young counts on his vigorous youth; he who is grown up on his manly strength; the old man trusts in his still robust health; every one finds something in his imagination to defend himself against the approach of death; and hence there are few who are disquieted by the question: whither goest thou? To the grave? Oh, it will be long before it comes to that with me! Supposing now, my dear brethren, that such is the case, and indeed it is true that some live longer than others, what difference does that make? There is no difference between him who has lived ten and him who has lived a thousand years, once the common end of all and the inevitable doom of death has come upon them. Consider the years of the patriarchs of old; we think what long lives they had; but what of that, after all? Their years came to an end at last. They all died; one sooner, another later, but all of them had to pay the debt of nature.

But what have I said? That we are all like the criminals led to death? We are rather worse off, if anything; for they know at least for certain how far off their death is; they know the way on which they are going; they can count the steps they still have to take, and hence they can say how long they still have to live. Not one of us can know that much. The Lord has said to us that we must die; we know that we are going to the grave, but not a whit more. How long we still have to journey; how far off death is from us; let him who can guess that. "You know not the day nor the hour," says Our Lord (St. Matthew 25: 13). And there is another thing we have from the infallible lips of God Himself, that He will come like a thief unawares, at a time when we least expect Him: "At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come" (St. Luke 12: 40).

II. Two travelers were journeying together through a desert; the one had over ten thousand dollars in gold, the other had nothing but a piece of dry bread and a jar of water. The first began to suffer thirst, but knew not where to find help, because his companion had too little water to spare him any. At last he offered all his gold for a drink of water. The second, greedy of the money and anxious to become rich all at once, exchanged the water for the gold. But how foolish he was! The first drank the water and thereby saved his life; the second grew tired carrying the gold and perished of thirst. If he had kept the

water he might have had the gold too, in time, for the first would have died and left it to him. But he did not think of that in time, and so his repentance came too late.

Where are you going? “Man shall go into the house of his eternity” (Eccles. 12: 5); that is, into that vast, infinite wilderness in which you shall find nothing but what you bring with you from here for your journey; in which there is no shelter for you, but what you have first built up for yourself, and no other life but what you have prepared for yourself here below. What will become of your wealth, oh, rich man? Will it go into eternity? But what good would it be to you there? That is a land in which money cannot buy anything. Woe to you, then, if you have made no other provision for the road; you shall surely suffer eternal hunger and thirst!

Hence we must provide in time, that we may have something to live on in eternity. What we neglect now we shall never be able to do hereafter. “Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good,” as St. Paul exhorts us. How many years have we already spent in this world? What a long and beautiful time we have had of it during all those years! But where are the virtues, the good works, the merits that we should have collected and sent before us into the house of our eternity? Alas! If our journey were now brought to an end, and the great account-book, in which are written all our thoughts, words and actions, and all the years, months, weeks, days and moments of our lives—if that book were now opened before the judgment-seat, and examined so as to separate the good from the bad, the useless from the meritorious, what would then remain over for our souls?

How great, how deplorable the stupidity of us mortals! If we go to the country for a few days to enjoy ourselves we send out provisions beforehand; we roast and boil and make every preparation, although we could find food enough in the place itself if we wish to pay for it. And now we are already half way on our journey to a vast desert, to the house of our eternity, where we can buy nothing, find nothing, expect nothing, except what we bring with us; where neither money, nor treasures, nor learning, nor knowledge, nor art, nor dignities, nor honors can help us in the least. Yet we make such little preparation, we think so little of this journey, that hardly once in a year do we ask ourselves: whither goest thou? Truly we are traveling as blind people! And if we occasionally make some provision for the road, that is, if we have performed some good works, gained some merits, we often act like the traveler of whom I have told you, who sold his jar of water; we sell our provisions, not for ten thousand dollars, but often for a wretched shilling of unjust profit, for a point of honor, for a moment of brutal pleasure, for the respect or love of some mortal creature! Thus we have lost all!

And how vain the repentance this folly of ours will entail, when we shall have come to the end of our journey and shall find nothing but our sins! When people enter on the married state without thought or reflection or seeking counsel from God, how bitterly they repent afterwards of their folly! Oh, would that I knew you before as I know you now, they say to each other; I would never have married you! Would that I had never laid eyes on that man! But all your wailings are of no avail; you should have thought of that before; it is too late to repent now; you must live with that man whether you like it or not. Yet be

contented and have patience; you can still hope that death will put an end to your troubles. But if you have once entered into the house of your eternity and you find things wrong with you there, there is no help for you, no hope; what you have neglected here is lost forever and can never be replaced. “We fools,” you will cry out, and with you all careless Christians for all eternity, “therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us;” all is lost and gone from us forever! Amen.

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