

What exchange shall a man give for his soul

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

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls
O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +
VOL. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Frequent Consideration of Death

“Behold, a dead man was carried out.”—St. Luke 7:12.

“Behold, a dead man was carried out;” one in the bloom of youth, who was enjoying life in all the vigor of health and strength, and who was, moreover, the only son of his sorrowing mother, the only consolation left to her in her widowed state! Thus death has no respect for age, or sex, or health, or prayers, or entreaties; He hurries all off without mercy, without distinction, young and old, great and lowly, together. Which of us who are here now alive and well shall be the first to be carried out dead? Shall it be I, or you, or some one else? We know not; but of a certainty every one’s turn will come, sooner or later. And yet we think so little of it! Daily, almost, do we see a corpse carried to the grave, and we look at it as if it were nothing at all to us; nay, if sometimes a thought of death tries to intrude itself, we endeavor to shake it off as unnecessary, tending to melancholy and sadness. But what do we gain by thus trying to hide ourselves from death? Shall we be able to avoid it by not thinking of it? No, indeed! On the contrary, we should frequently and seriously meditate on it, for thereby we shall be helped to lead a good Christian life.

The frequent consideration and remembrance of death is one of the best means of leading a holy life.

The whole idea of a good, pious, Christian life may be summed up in the twofold precept: Avoid evil and do good. But if there is anything to act as a counterpoise against all sin and evil, if there is anything that can spur us on to good and virtuous actions, it is surely the frequent consideration of death, in which one is constantly reminding himself: I shall die; I shall one day be carried to the grave a corpse. In the very beginning of the world God impressed this fact on the mind of man as a necessary preservative against all crime. How happy was the state of Adam in paradise in his first innocence! There was a constant peace between the spirit and the flesh; there was no inclination to evil; all the appetites and desires were in the most harmonious subjection to reason, so that not one of them dared to move without the command of the will. And yet when God gave Adam the command not to eat the forbidden fruit He at the same time put the thought of death into his mind, lest he should transgress the command. “In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death” (Gen. 2: 17).

Wherever we go divine Providence has surrounded us with exhortations to this effect. Nearly everything we perceive by the senses is a picture and messenger of death, that calls out to us: Remember, oh, man, that thou must die! Hardly a day in the year on which we go out into the street that we do not see either a corpse being carried to the grave, or some one clad in mourning, or an altar in the church on which Mass is offered for souls departed; or some friend comes up to us and says such a one is dead.

Nothing grows or is born on earth, in the air, or in the water, but something has died or decayed in its place. You who are now in the bloom of youth and crown yourselves with flowers, hear what those same flowers say to you: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed" (Job 14: 1, 2); today the flower blooms, tomorrow it decays. If you stand before the looking-glass to contemplate your beauty, even that announces death to you, for it reminds you of the words of the Psalmist: "Surely man passeth as an image" (Ps. 38: 7). All the years, months, weeks, days, hours, and moments that we have lived say to each one of us: you are now so much nearer to the hour of your death. Fire, water, sword, bullet, poison, sicknesses of countless kinds, nay, our very pleasures, cry out to us and warn us that they are the instruments that help us to death.

If we only kept this thought before our minds, who would then dare abandon himself to a wicked life! I am altogether of the opinion that, as there is no power, no authority, no riches in the world that can protect us against the approach of death, so also there is no vice, no evil inclination, no bad habit, no matter how inveterate, that cannot be tamed, subdued, and eradicated altogether by the frequent consideration of death. The three springs from which all our vices flow are, as St. John says, "the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (I John 2: 16); the desire of sensual pleasures, of worldly wealth, and of honor and esteem. Now, if I often thought to myself: I must die; in a few years, perhaps today or tomorrow, I shall be carried to the grave to be buried; what shall then become of my dignities, honors, the esteem of men? So, too, with whatever knowledge, science, skill I may have had; death hurries all away; the bell that tolls for my funeral will wipe out all memory of me, as the Psalmist says: "Their memory hath perished with a noise" (Ps. 9: 7). Not a vestige shall I leave behind me, nor any memento except, perhaps, an epitaph which shall describe how I was once and am now no more. My dwelling shall be with and amongst the meanest paupers; my companions, my bed and my covering shall be worms and rottenness. If I thought of all this and frequently recalled it, how quickly I should free myself from pride and vanity!

If we often thought to ourselves: We must die; in a few years, perhaps today or tomorrow, we shall be carried to the grave and buried; death will creep on stealthily, like a thief: "I will come to thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come to thee" (Apoc. 3: 3). Then everything will be taken from us and we shall be completely stripped; nothing will be left to us of all the money we have, of all our possessions and revenues; we shall not be able to take a penny with us on the journey; of the whole earth, nothing, not as much as a straw, will remain to us save and except the hole in which we shall be buried; the rich man, "when he shall die he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him" (Ps. 48: 18). Then will be seen to whom my goods belonged, and that they were merely lent to me for a time, and not given to me as their owner. Sometimes a dog follows two people who are going the same way; to whom does the dog belong? That you cannot say, for he follows both; but wait a little, till they come to a cross-road and separate; then the dog will follow his master and leave the other. As long as a man is in life and has to do with the world, one might imagine that he really possesses worldly goods; but wait till he comes to the cross-roads that lead to eternity, then you will see who is the real owner of his goods; for they at once leave the man who has been using them, allowing him to go forth bare and naked, and follow and remain with the world. Ah, when we think of this, is it possible we should be so infatuated with temporal things as to seek or possess anything wrongfully or unjustly, sacrificing thereby a long eternity, the treasures of heaven, our souls and our God?

If I often thought thus to myself: I must die. When? I know not; it may be to day. I must die. Where? I know not; it may be in this very church. I must die. How? I know not; death may surprise me in the state of sin. And where shall my soul go then? Before the judgment-seat of God, to give an account of all my actions, and to be sent either to the eternal joys of heaven or to the eternal torments of hell. If I frequently renewed this thought, could I sleep quietly one night in the state of sin? Could I offend God grievously for the sake of any earthly good, or honor, or pleasure? No, that could never be! "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. 7: 40). Nothing is so powerful to keep us from sin as the

frequent consideration of death. And again, there is no more powerful incentive to practice virtue than the frequent thought and consideration of death. The motive and the end are one and the same thing. For instance: the end for which war is waged is to gain a victory over the enemy; the same victory is the motive or reason that fills the soldier with courage and urges him to venture boldly into the field and to fight bravely. The end that the sick man has in view is the recovery of his health; the same health is the motive that impels him to take the most bitter medicines readily, no matter how disagreeable they are to him naturally. The end of a business is gain; the same gain is the motive that impels the merchant to undertake the most dangerous journeys by land and sea, and to spare himself no trouble or inconvenience. So, too, death is the end of all things; but the same death can and must be the motive that impels us to do good works during life, that our death may be a happy one.

Such are the thoughts that the consideration of death must suggest to any Christian who desires to die well and to make sure of his salvation. I must die, he says to himself; I know not when; it may be to day or to morrow. As long as I am in this life, so long does the period of combat last for me; if I do not gain the victory before death I shall never gain it for all eternity. Now is the time for me to work, as far as my soul is concerned; what I do not gain before death I must do without for all eternity. Therefore I must and will now heap up merit by the practice of good works, so that I may have something to live on forever in heaven. Death will, in a moment, take from me the money and other things that I have amassed with so much trouble; be it so! I care little for such goods. But it cannot take from me the alms I have given and the other works of Christian charity I have performed. These shall be safely stored up for me in heaven by our Lord himself. Therefore I will now bestow a good part of my temporal wealth in charity, thus sending it on before me into eternity. Death will strip me of all my clothing. No matter; it cannot take from me the beautiful robe of sanctifying grace. Death will at once deprive me of all pleasures and comforts and of the love and society of men. Let it do so! I shall not require those things at the end of my life. But it cannot take from me my prayers, my morning and evening devotions, my frequent confessions and holy Communions, my constant intimacy with God. These things shall remain with me; these shall follow me into eternity:

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors: for their works follow them” (Apoc. 14: 13). Death will give my body over to the worms, to be changed in a short time into dust and ashes. But all the more earnestly will I now mortify that flesh with toil and labor, with temperance and fasting, with voluntary penances and austerities, and so wear it away in the zealous service of my God.

The axe is already laid at the root of the tree; death will probably soon strike the last blow. What are you doing? There is no time to be lost. Where are your prayers, your fasting, penance and mortification? It will be too late bye-and-bye to look after those things. Now is the time to be up and doing! If you wish to lead good and holy lives the best thing for you to do is to meditate frequently on death. “Behold, a dead man was carried out.” It is not convenient for you to kneel down beside a coffin every day; but you can daily follow the advice of Thomas a Kempis, and think, for instance, when you get up in the morning: this evening I may be lying dead. When going to rest: perhaps I shall be found dead in my bed tomorrow morning. If a neighbor, friend, or acquaintance dies, you can think: one day or other my turn will come, too. If you hear the funeral bell tolling: this bell will one day ring for me also. When going out of the house: one day I shall be carried out of this house dead. When passing by a cemetery: that place will be my home one of these days; how would I wish to have lived when that time comes? Must I not, then, prepare for that supreme hour? Let those be your thoughts, that your resolution. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” Amen.

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