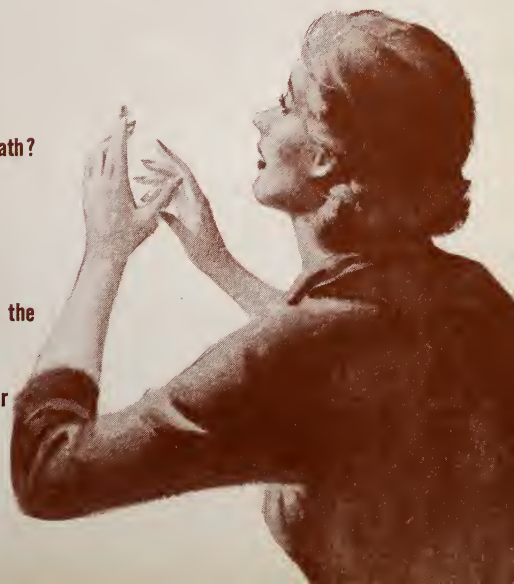




THINK ABOUT **DEATH** . . . AND START TO **LIVE**

CONTENTS

- How to Think about Death
- What is Your Attitude Towards Death?
- What Happens after Death?
- How to Think about Heaven
- What the Last Anointing Does for the Dangerously Sick
- What the Catholic Church Does for People at Death



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Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are some times mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

**SUPREME COUNCIL
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
Religious Information Bureau
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HOW TO THINK ABOUT DEATH

If you are a normal human being, the most impressive fact concerning your life is the certainty of your death. This fact is brought home to you every time someone close to you, by reason of love or association, is removed from the land of the living by death. It grows more fixedly into your consciousness as the years of your life are checked off one by one, each seeming to have passed more rapidly than the one before, each making you aware of some new weakness of your body such as might be, or one day will be, the cause of your death.



There are two ways of looking upon this fact of your death. One way is to try to forget it; to concentrate on living as fully and enjoyably as you can each day, almost as if there were no such thing as death, or as if you were convinced that you will be an exception to the general rule and will not die. The other way is to look at death frequently, humbly, intelligently, trying to learn from it whatever it may teach that is of value for your daily living.

The Catholic Church, inspired

by the wisdom of Christ, urges you to choose the second way of looking upon death. Besides incorporating many reminders of it and lessons to be drawn from it in its year-round activities, it sets aside a month for special considerations of death. It is the month of November, when nature,

with its barren trees, withered grass, lifeless soil and freezing winds, presents a dramatic picture of death to all who can see.

The Church urges you to draw from the thought of death lessons of life, of lasting life, for yourself, to think about your beloved dead and to do something for them. Under its wise guidance, then, death becomes a teacher, a motive and an opportunity. Under each of these heads it loses much of its fearfulness; indeed, it becomes a means of life, it leads to life, the kind of life in which there will be no mourning or grieving, no death or sorrow or parting any more.

Anything is a teacher that starts a train of thought and raises questions in your mind that lead you to seek and find important truths by which you must live. In this sense

death is a powerful teacher; the thought of it leaves you no rest until you have grasped all the truths that throw light on its meaning and make it no longer a prod to despair.

You cannot think of death without asking why it must be, when everything within you is made to yearn for life and to resist death. And you cannot cast about for an answer to your "Why?" without learning that there is only one answer, and that no other will ever satisfy your mind. The answer that presents itself out of the very harshness and seeming cruelty of death is that it is a penalty, equally shared by all members of the human race, for some evil into which the human race has fallen.

Man's Destiny

Here your reason, which tells you unmistakably that there is the element of penalty in death, gropes outward to find confirmation of its conviction in some sign from God, and to seek further explanation that makes it not a penalty synonymous with despair. And you find God has given you not only a sign; He has spoken clearly, He has revealed the truth to you.

On the one hand He has confirmed your conviction that death is a penalty by pointing to the first or original sin of your human family as its historical cause, and to all the other sins, down to the last one committed by yourself, that have been occasioned by the weakness inherited from that original fall.

On the other hand, He has sent His Son into the world as your

Redeemer, the one who made it possible for you, despite your certain bodily death, to possess a new life, even a divine life, forever. Your Redeemer made that possible by accepting the major part of the penalty of your family's sins and your own actual sins in His terrible death. He offered you the divine fruits of His death through His Church, His Mass and His sacraments. He taught you in many sermons, instructions, precepts and commands, how to live in conformity with the new life He won for you by His death.

If the thought of your death does not inspire you to look for and find this explanation of its meaning, you are the most miserable creature in the world. In that case you have to keep saying to yourself every time you come face to face with the death of a friend or with the thought of your own death, that life is a mockery, a jest, a cruel burden, a worthless gift. In that case you must creep into the ranks of the cynics and the embittered, who say there is no God, there is no justice, there is no sense or reason in human life. In that case you will find your mind tortured and tormented by the cruel facts that children die of strange diseases, thousands of the young, middle-aged and old die every year from cancer, millions die in useless wars, and you yourself are hastening toward death even now by every breath you draw.

If you won't accept your instinctive recognition of the truth that death is a penalty, and God's explanation of what the penalty is for, nobody, not the greatest scien-

tist or philosopher in the world, will ever be able to take the mystery out of death for you. And if you won't accept your redemption from the worst penalties of sin through the death of Jesus Christ, you may just as well make ready now for black despair. Nothing can save you from it—not all the frenetic grasping for a few hours or years of pleasure that you may be tempted to settle for if you will not accept eternal life from Jesus Christ. You may put it off for a while by activity, but you will catch up with despair certainly some day.

Moreover, it is only this true explanation of death that furnishes you with any solid reason for loving other human beings, for doing good to them, for respecting their rights. They have a claim on you only because they share both the penalty of death with you and the redemption from everlasting death merited for all by the death of Christ.

If you won't believe that, despite death, men are immortal, that they are destined for heaven or hell, that they are given life only to prepare for death as a beginning of heaven or hell, don't talk about the sweetness of brotherly love or the glory of democracy or the necessity of respecting the rights of others. If you decide that death is the mysterious end and annihilation of man, be logical: take everything you can out of your few years of life even at the expense of others: kill, lie, cheat, steal—there is nothing to stop you if death is the end of everything. Be a Hitler if you get the chance, or a Stalin, or a gang-

ster. The life and freedom and property of others are the cheapest things you can expend for your own momentary happiness if you believe that death is the end of all.

But if you accept God's explanation of death, then only will you know why you must respect and love and help your neighbor. You will know that you dare not tamper with the bodies or souls of other human beings—because they belong to God. You will know that at your death justice and mercy will be meted out to you by God according as you have meted them out to others. All this you will be taught by death if you permit your reason to reach out for and accept the explanation of it from God.

Death is a Motive

What you are taught does not always become a motive for what you do. It can be held in a kind of academic way, as a truth that has little bearing on your actions, as many a man knows the truth that Christ is God, but in no way acts upon what he knows. Or the truth may be forgotten in moments of stress and temptation when it is needed most.

Death is a motive in the sense that it can and must bring the truths it teaches to influence your conduct every day. If it does not, you will be no better off than the man who has refused to look for or learn any part of the truth about death.

The thought of death and its meaning is especially a motive that must be brought to bear on decisions and choices that involve an

opportunity for sin. You know the truth that your soul is not going to die when your body does. It will go right on living, with a more acute consciousness, and greater capacity for happiness or pain, than it ever possessed before the death of your body.

Sin and Death

But there is a more terrific form of death that can befall your soul than that which can assail your body. It is the death of serious sin, of disobedience to the commands of the Redeemer Who won for you a second chance of life and everlasting happiness. This is sometimes called the death of your soul, but only by a figure of speech. It is not a death of unconsciousness, like the death of your body. It is a death of perfectly conscious unhappiness that can last forever. If this death of your soul called sin comes together with the death of your body, it will be the beginning of everlasting pain.

There are two things that make the thought of death a powerful motive for resisting sin. The first is its uncertainty as to time and place and manner. You never know but that it may be just after you have committed a deliberate serious sin when you may be thrust into death. It is estimated that three out of five deaths are sudden deaths. If you train yourself to remember that you are more apt to die suddenly than with time for repentance and preparation, you will never permit yourself to fall into serious sin.

The other thing to be considered is an even more powerful motivat-

ing force in your life. It is the fact that you are always dependent on God's grace to repent sincerely of your deliberate sins before death. The possibility of a quick and sudden death right after a serious sin is not the only danger to be feared. Much more to be feared is the possibility that one sin can so easily lead to another and another or a hundred or a thousand, and the combination of all these sins can make the grace of repentance impossible, except by miracle, before death. That is why the unprovided death after a long life of unrepented sins, is as much to be feared as a sudden death after one sin.

It is the thought of death, therefore, that makes it unthinkable for a Catholic to enter into a bad marriage. This means entering freely into a state of continuous and frequently repeated serious sins, so that death has to be feared every day and night and every hour of each day as the beginning of everlasting punishment.

It is the thought of death that gives courage to the wills of young people in love, who, though they may be tempted to sin, will find their resistance to sin stiffened by the fact that they must fear not only their own death in sin, but that of the one whom they profess to love.

It is the thought of death that makes it easy for husbands and wives to avoid the all too common sins of infidelity and contraception, because it keeps them mindful that life, with all the burdens created by loyalty to Christ, is short and

swift, and at death eternity begins.

It is the thought of death that can motivate anyone who has sinned to seek forgiveness at once, to let no day pass without going to confession and being forgiven by God, lest His call to an accounting come before the sin has been taken away, or lest, before the grace of repentance is seized upon, the repetition of the same sins may place it beyond reach.

Death is an Opportunity

If you have learned and accepted the truth about death, and if you use the thought of it as a motive for living in loyalty to Christ and in loving God, then you will inevitably find it a marvelous opportunity for charity to others. Since death is the most important event that ever happens to anybody, you will find in its frequent occurrence around you a wide variety of occasions for practicing such charity. Some of them are the following:

1. *Death calls forth the charity of the living toward the dying.* If you understand death, you don't want to die unprepared. By the same token, you do not want anybody else to die unprepared. And you will be on the alert to use every possible means to assist the dying.

One of your favorite prayers will be that God's grace will be extended, even at the last moment, to those who are about to die without it. An indulgent form of this prayer is: "Heart of Jesus once in agony, have pity on the dying."

You will not be deterred by human respect or any other unworthy

motive from helping even dying strangers, whom you may chance upon in accidents, to make acts of perfect sorrow for their sins, trust in the merits of Christ, love of God and desire for baptism, as the need may be.

Above all, you must be ready to do everything possible for members of your family and close friends when they are sick and dying. You will call the priest to minister to them in good time; you will encourage and help them with their prayers; you will pray at their bedside even when consciousness has gone, that God will remain with them to the end.

2. *Death inspires sweet and effective charity toward the bereaved.* Those who love someone greatly and lose that person by death are inclined in the first moments of their bereavement to forget the truth about death and the lessons it is meant to teach.

It is then that your charity as a friend keeps reminding them of the truth, and, if they have not been living so as to be prepared for a good death, gently suggests that they take the lesson of another's death to their own hearts.

Indeed, you alone, if you are a true Christian, will have anything of value to say to the bereaved who mourn the passing of one whom they loved. You alone can speak with conviction of the glorious exchange the dead person has made of this life for a better one. You alone can speak the comforting words that promise a reunion of the grieving living with the departed dead. You alone can en-

courage, as your love will inspire, the bereaved to act on the reminder given by death that the only thing that truly matters for anybody is that he die well prepared.

3. *Death presents occasions for true acts of charity toward the dead.* Within the explanation of death that God has given through His Son and that He keeps before your mind through the Church He founded and guides, two truths are contained that inspire your active charity toward the dead.

Day of Decision

The first is the truth that at death the power of meriting stops for a soul. This means that it is no longer possible for one who has died to pay any debt that he owes to God except through suffering. If he died in mortal sin his debt will be paid forever in hell. If he died in venial sin, or without having made full atonement for sins that were forgiven, he must pay the debt in a place called purgatory. Only those who completely turned from God by mortal sin are condemned to hell. But those who die with slight defects or a small debt still owed cannot enter heaven till "the last farthing of the debt is paid."

The second is the truth that the living can help to pay the small debts still owed by the souls of the dead. The living still have the power of meriting; they can still draw on the infinite merits of Christ; they can, through the perseverance of their love, apply their merits to the relief of those who cannot merit for themselves any more.

You can practice the charity in-

spired by these two truths in two ways. First, by taking part in the wake and the funeral of one who has died and making these occasions for prayer and sacrifice in their behalf. At the wake you kneel beside the body and join in reciting the rosary and other prayers for the one who has been taken away. At the funeral you unite with others in offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass for his soul, saying over and over again in the consoling words of the liturgy, "Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him."

Secondly, you practice charity to the dead by remembering them long after the funeral. You do so by offering up the loneliness of separation and the pangs of grief to atone for their sins. You do so by repeated prayers in their behalf, and by offering up the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion again and again for their souls. And this charity is not confined to your own beloved dead, but embraces all who are in purgatory waiting for the vision of God.

Thus does death lead to life. It leads to the life that can be found only in the teachings of Christ, who took the mystery out of death and made it an occasion for thinking of the eternal life He merited for all. It leads to life because it constitutes a most powerful motive for avoiding the everlasting death that is caused by sin. And it leads to life because it inspires the charity that releases others from bondage and suffering, and speeds their entry into the glorious vision and life everlasting with God.

WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD DEATH?

Under the heading "Must You Die?" an advertisement appeared recently in many daily newspapers. Its message was of the "come-on" sort of which dealers in occult and superstitious formulas of happiness make frequent use. It did not say outright that it offered you freedom from death though the question in its heading quite broadly hinted that it could; but it did speak about strange powers that would be handed over to you if you would just write to such and such an address.

Of course the sane man and woman will have nothing to do with any formula of happiness that is predicated on even the hint that it can preserve human beings from bodily death.

But leaving the insane to their dreams of escaping inevitable death, we may say that among those who are sane enough to know that they will some day surely die, there is an interesting variety of attitudes about death. Indeed, a man's attitude toward death is a key to his whole character. Among the six such attitudes specifically named below every human being can



be pigeon-holed and a considerable body of facts about his life and character can be set down from the classification to which he belongs.

Since this is a listing of all possible attitudes toward death, it will be of great value for every reader to find himself under the proper heading, and to see whether or not a true picture of his general character is given there. By contrasting in his mind the logic of these various attitudes toward death, a reader may be inspired to see which is the only one that conforms to reality and makes sense out of life itself.

1. *You have convinced yourself that there is no such thing as life after death.*

There are two ways in which this conviction comes to take hold of the mind of a human being. The first is through association, especially in his formative years, with highly reputed but materialistic scientists, philosophers, literateurs and educators. In choice language and with a background of seemingly vast erudition, these latter speak scornfully of such realities as the soul, an intelligent personal God,

life after death, heaven and hell, etc. Heard often enough, these irresponsible snipings at the truths of the invisible world can paralyze the thinking processes of the immature. They have no way of knowing how warped is the judgment and how shallow the thinking of the "masters" and "doctors" who teach them.

Jungle Law

The other source of the conviction that there is no life after death is the overwhelming desire to be unrestricted in the pursuit of the sweets of life on earth. There is always some of this combined with supine subjection to the opinions of erudite atheists, as there is much of it in the latter themselves. In every human being there is, at times, a feeling that it would be wonderful not to have to worry about laws, punishments, life after death, heaven and hell. If, despite the objections of the mind, this feeling is given in to, and if one acts for a time as if there were no laws, punishments, life after death, etc., one can come to believe that his feelings represent the truth. Even the intellect, such is the tendency toward pride in human beings, does not mind being told that there is no intellect above it, and no authority that it need respect.

But those who have convinced themselves that there is no life after death are the dangerous members of society. Against the strong uprisings of their animal passions they see no reason for objection or combat. They want free love, promiscuity, birth-control, abortion,

mercy-killings, etc., established as law. They usually hate churches and clergymen, because these stand in the way of the unlimited license they want, and at the same time continually remind them of an immortality they have denied. If the world were left to be run by such men, its name would be chaos.

2. You have convinced yourself that after death you will live only in the memory of your posterity.

The religion of humanitarianism, divorced from the last shred of theology, has created this conviction in the minds of many. Man's purpose in life, according to this "religion," is to make a name for himself by doing good to others, by relieving human suffering, by spreading laughter and happiness, by promoting peace, in short, by making this world a better place for all to live in. A man's sole reward for dedicating his life to these purposes will be, after his death, the eulogies that will be spoken of him, the statues erected in his honor, the praises bestowed on him by the history books. He will not be conscious of any of these things, because death will be the end of him, body and soul. Only his name will remain in honor, if he has served mankind, in dishonor if he has added to its sufferings.

The funeral sermons of many religious ministers seem to have nothing more to offer the dead of whom they speak than this survival among the memories of their friends. In real life, however, it just doesn't work as a very effective incentive for being good, even good

to others in a humanitarian sort of way. There are thousands of men who care nothing for what posterity will think of them one way or the other, when they will no longer be consciously thinking themselves; they want only to have as good a time as possible in this world, and all such ideals as social justice, conjugal chastity, forgiveness of enemies, etc., are not permitted to stand in their way. There are others who are temperamentally inclined to a sort of expansive, effusive "do-goodism," but it is all pretty much on the surface, if they look forward to no survival after death. It doesn't stop them from divorcing their wives and ruining the lives of their children if that happens to recommend itself to their passions; they make speeches about brotherly love, but that doesn't prevent them from underpaying their employees; they may join in highly publicized hospital drives, but will undermine a business competitor at every opportunity. Desiring to have a good reputation, even after death, has some value as a motive for external and public goodness; it has none for overcoming selfishness, which is of a secret and private nature.

If you have convinced yourself that your only life after death will be as a memory, you won't let humanitarianism stand in the way of your having as much joy as you can squeeze out of this world. And you will wonder why you are so miserable, even though you take everything you want.

3. *You have convinced yourself that there is a life after death, but*

that there is no such place as an eternal hell.

Perhaps you are among those who use one of two arguments for denying the existence of hell. The first argument is usually expressed as follows: "God is too good to create an eternal hell." This is sometimes elaborated by the words: "If I were God, I would not create a hell, therefore God could not create one." This foolish argumentation blinds itself to the fact that it was God's goodness that created free and immortal beings, and that the test of their freedom must lie in their choosing between heaven and hell. The tremendous privilege of being able to choose and enjoy an eternal happiness had to be counter-balanced by each man's freedom to choose eternal hell. If you have convinced yourself that there is a heaven but no hell, you have made a fool out of God and a dumb brute out of man who couldn't enjoy heaven even when he got there.

The other reason often given for the denial of hell is the principle of the popular magazine writers that every sinner suffers all the hell he deserves right here in this world. This simply does not conform either to fact or principle. The fact is that a great many people get considerable undeserved joy out of their sins, and by them, inflict tremendous pain on others. The principle is that to turn against God by serious rebellion against His laws, and to remain thus turned against Him until death, deserves the eternal punishment of never enjoying the vision of God, which is the essence of hell.

The truth is that few people who have been instructed in the elements of Christianity ever feel inclined to deny hell until they want to do or to have something that makes them deserving of eternal hell. Catholic divorcees often approach their second (and invalid) marriages bravely shouting to themselves that there cannot be a hell. Catholics who adopt birth-control as a regular feature of their married lives keep whispering to each other that there cannot be a hell. The idea of doubting this clear teaching of Jesus Christ never came to them until they wanted something that Jesus Christ forbade.

God's Merit System

4. *You are convinced that there is an eternal hell, but that practically nobody goes there after death.*

Much of the freedom from worry about hell into which people have lulled themselves has developed from the cardinal principle of the Reformation. This principle states that all one needs, to be saved from hell and to enter heaven, is to believe in the merits of Christ. While it is true that most non-Catholic teachers maintain that a true belief in the merits of Christ will show itself in good works, even though the good works are of no value for salvation, it does not work out that way in practice. The psychological effect of telling people that all they must do to be saved is to believe in Christ as their Redeemer, and that good deeds have nothing whatsoever to do with deciding one's fate, is that they will

begin sooner or later to abandon moral principles and even Christ's definite commands. Surely the non-Catholic compromise on birth-control, divorce and remarriage, euthanasia, etc., can be traced clearly back to the naive acceptance of the unscriptural dictum that all one needs to be saved is a belief in the merits of Christ. Out of that same shrunken Christianity arises the belief that it is almost impossible to go to hell.

Another consideration that people sometimes advance to lull themselves into a sense of security about hell is phrased as follows: "What I'm doing may be wrong, but if I am sent to hell for it, I'll find plenty of company there." The implication is that "there are so many of us so-called sinners that God could not possibly send us all to hell," or that "with so much company hell won't be so very bad." In this attitude it is forgotten that each soul will be judged after death as if it were the only immortal soul ever created by God. It will be judged according to its deeds, not according to what others did. It is also forgotten that the companionships of hell will constitute one of its greatest tortures.

5. *You are convinced that there is a hell, and you know that if you were to die suddenly now you would have to be sent there, but you are also convinced that you will not die for a long time and that just before you do, you will reconcile yourself with God.*

In other words, you are living much as you please, and wherever

sin holds out profit or pleasure, you embrace it. But there is plenty of time ahead. You are not going to die for a long time. As death draws nearer, you will wisely withdraw from your sins, and just before the end you will make a magnificent act of contrition and a sincere confession, and so escape eternal punishment.

But your reckoning contains some egregious flaws. Despite your cock-sureness, your death might be very sudden and very soon. Also, you are forgetting that you cannot, either now or thirty or forty years from now, make a good act of contrition without God's grace, and the way you are living is lessening by the hour your chances of cooperating with such a grace from God. You are making the mistake that so many thousands have made: of failing to see that most men are permitted by God to die pretty much after the fashion in which they have lived. Your promised deathbed conversion is a mirage, a delusion, a terrible deception of the devil.

It does, of course, make life very sweet, to take whatever you can get out of sin, with the expectation of giving it all up and making a friend of God in the end. But the fact is that God refuses to be mocked by people who plan their lives in this way. Neither does He mock the good people who throughout life made many sacrifices and suffered many hardships to avoid hell, by making it very easy for persons like yourself to retreat from the hell your whole life was planned to deserve.

6. *You are convinced that there is a hell which will last forever, that you will be sent there if you die at enmity with God, and that the only sure way to avoid that fate is to live each day as if you might die that day.*

There is nothing doubtful, in the words of Christ, the Son of God, about the reality of hell. He said plainly that it is the place to which the unrepentant sinner will be condemned forever, that there "the worm dieth not, and the fire is never extinguished", that "it is far better to go into heaven blind and maimed and lame, than with two eyes and two hands and two feet to be cast into the depths of hell."

He did more than that. He made it clear that no man can live as he pleases, with no regard for God's laws, and in the end cry out "Lord, Lord" and be saved. He said: "Be always ready, for you know not the day nor the hour." He said that death will come as a thief in the night and that blessed is the man who is found watchful and ready. And He gave no comforting assurances that only a very few would be condemned to hell; rather He spoke of the throng to whom He would have to say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

You are a wise man or woman, if your attitude toward death is based on these basic truths. And you are beyond being frightened by talk of atom bombs, and chemical warfare, and future catastrophies, so long as you are convinced that death in any form will be but your gateway to a life of happiness with God forever.

What Happens AFTER DEATH?

Events will take place very rapidly in the moment after you die. What those events will be has been argued by different men.

Only one person has lived who knew the exact and whole truth about what will happen to you after you die. He was Christ, the Son of God, and He has told you the truth. Here is a picture, drawn from the central facts He has made known to you, of how things will go with you after you die.

No matter how you die, the moment of death will be marked by a sharp awakening of brilliant consciousness. You will know who you are, what you have been, what you were intended for, what you have done with your life. This sudden burst of fuller consciousness than you ever knew before may have been preceded by hours or even days of unconsciousness. Perhaps you will be very sick before you die; you will recognize nobody and have no awareness of yourself; you will appear to be merely a laboriously breathing human body. People around you, possibly, will not even be able to discern the exact moment of your death, so



quietly will you slip away. But you will know the exact moment yourself. Never in your life was there so much light around you. Never did you see things so clearly and so sharply as you do now.

Or, you may die suddenly, in an accident or of a heart attack or in a furious struggle against drowning.

You will be conscious right up to the minute or two before you die. But even in that case, your previous consciousness will seem like half-sleep in comparison with the sudden awareness of yourself and of other things that will come to you in the moment of your dying.

If you are old and tired and sleepy just before you die, you will suddenly feel, in the moment of death, like a young person with the fullest vigor of your faculties indeed, with a power of thinking and willing that will be easier and more acute than you ever experienced in the full vigor of your youth. One reason for this more perfect consciousness and mental activity after death is that your mind and will no longer have to act through the sluggish instrumentality of your body. In life on

earth, nothing can enter your mind except it approach through your bodily senses, your sense memory, your imagination. It takes time to think things out while living on earth because body and soul have to work together, and the body can often interfere with, instead of assisting, the process of thinking in the soul. At death, the body will no longer be required for thinking, and it will no longer be able to distract your mind or to cloud your vision. You will see things as they are — yourself, your companions, your deeds, your whole life, God.

Instant Judgment

With this new and brilliant consciousness of yourself and other things, you will now be subjected to an instantaneous judgment and sentence on the part of Jesus Christ, Who, according to Sacred Scripture and His own words, "has been appointed to be the judge of the living and the dead."

With your new ability to see things as they really are, and with some help from God, you will in a moment be shown your entire life. This review of your life will bear no comparison with that which some people have reported as passing before their eyes when they seemed to be drowning, though at the last moment they were saved. This review will be not merely factual, but interpretive; that is, you will see the true value or the real evil of all that you did in life. You will not even think of making any of the foolish excuses for evil that passed so glibly from your lips in life, because now a foolish excuse

will appear as that and nothing more; there will not be anybody but God and yourself concerned, and you will be fully and overwhelmingly aware of how His knowledge penetrates everything and brings into light every secret and long hidden motive of your soul.

But the important things that your mind will fix itself on in that instant of your judgment will be the last conscious decision you made about God before you died. It is true, you will wonder, now that you have a glimpse of God in the clear-thinking moment of your judgment, how you could have had any but one disposition toward God, that of love and longing to be with Him. But at the same time you will know how exceedingly important it was to love Him before you saw Him, when you knew Him only from His creation and His words.

Fateful Decision

So with a fixed intensity you behold your last conscious and deliberate decision about God. Perhaps that decision was made many years before you died. Made somewhat in this way: "I suppose there is a God. I suppose He made the world and me. I suppose I could learn something about Him and what He asks of me if I tried. But there are many other interesting things in life. And there are burdens attached to thinking about God. If there is a God, I surely do not need Him, and I will not have Him..." It is hard to set down with what anguish this decision

will be recalled in the moment when your soul will catch its first glimpse of God!

Or perhaps your last conscious decision about God was made in the form of a choice of sin, of something you knew was contrary to everything God loved and everything He ever said. By accepting it you closed God out of your life—you knew it—you knew it. You thought at times of giving it up; you still could choose God. But you did not; the ties grew tighter; the sins grew even sweeter; you kept pushing God back—back—and that turned out to be your last conscious decision about God. You see it so clearly now; every new sin and new decision; every chance for repentance, reform, confession; every push you gave to God, sending Him out of your consciousness and away from the love you knew you owed to Him; then the last push—the last decision. And the irony of how little you got out of it, how fragile and momentary were the satisfactions of your sins, now that you look into the face of God!

Then You Will See

Or perhaps your last decision about God was simply one in which you stated (to yourself and to others) that God was asking too much of you, and that what He offered in return for what He asked was not good enough for you. Your clear vision in this moment of judgment gives you a view of heaven and hell such as you could never have had on earth. But God had put those realities into words; you knew what the words meant. Now

you not only know, but you see. And your excruciating agony is to know that the last will-act you made about God was to decide that heaven was not worth the routine of Mass-going, Sacrament-receiving, fasting and abstaining, and law-keeping that His authority demanded, and that hell was not to be feared as a prospect. How you would like to escape consciousness now as your mind is fixed on that last decision, or even to go mad, insane, to escape the consequences of that decision. But that decision was your madness; now there is only clear, logical, inescapable thinking, in the light of the supreme vision and justice of God.

Your Last Decision

Perhaps, too, your last decision in life about God will now come before you as one of love. It was when you thought of heaven and hell and the cross on which Christ died and of your desire for God's love. And you died shortly after that turning of your face entirely to God! That was your last decision, your latest choice about God: you loved Him—you loved Him—and you died loving Him thus. Everything that contributed to that last act of love comes before you, and a great outburst of gratitude wells up from your will for each word of prayer, each deed of sacrifice, each victory of virtue, that made possible your last act of love.

Thus, though it takes long to write of it and to read it, your judgment will be instantaneous, and your sentence will be part of it, and this will depend on the last

decision you made concerning God before you died.

After the judgment, you will immediately go to the place you have chosen for yourself by that last decision concerning God.

If the last decision was against God, in favor of something you could have only by ignoring or rejecting God, your place will be hell. You will go there immediately. It will be a terrible moment, but its terror will not be momentary—it will stretch into eternity. Its agony will be intensified by the fact that you will know how easy it would have been to escape this fate. Strangely, too, where in life you had often said that if you went to hell you would have plenty of company there, now the company you find in hell only adds to your suffering. But the worst thing you will experience in hell will be the separation from God, now that you know, with the new, sharp, after-death clarity of vision, that you never needed, and never will need, anybody or anything but Him to make you happy. At the same time, that last decision you made in life against God will have crystallized into a permanent hatred of God, which you will not be able to escape even though you know how much you need Him.

If your last decision about God was one of love and perfect self-surrender to God's will, with no element of inclination to oppose Him remaining in your soul, your place will be heaven. You will be transported there immediately. Now, as you enter heaven, you will

think of many of the scornful things that agnostics and pretending atheists said about it on earth. Your thought is swallowed up in supreme pity for them... This is like nothing that ever pleased you before... This is everything... This is what you want... everything you want... this will be forever.

And if your last decision about God while you still lived on earth was a mixed decision, one in which you loved God and wanted God, but not quite enough to give up a little selfishness, a little peevishness, a little vanity, a little envy, then your place will be purgatory. You will go there immediately. You will know so clearly that the little moral sores must be healed, the little sins must be atoned for in suffering. Perhaps you will catch a glimpse of heaven on your way to the prison of purgatory, and then there will be a strange mixture within you of tormenting sadness that you cannot enter your "home" at once, and of deeply rooted joy that you have not lost it forever.

Final Judgment

Thus will it happen to you when you die. And when, finally, God decrees the end of the world in which you had lived, your soul will come forth from wherever your life's last decision about God placed it, will be reunited with your body refashioned from the dust or mold or earth into which it decayed, and you, body and soul, will be judged and sentenced a second time. This time before the eyes of all mankind. Remember, you and you alone make the choice.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT HEAVEN



It is safe to say that many people find loyalty to God and the persevering practice of religion burdensome only because they have not acquired the important habit of thinking about heaven.

Just as the thought of hell is a powerful deterrent to surrender to evil, so the thought of heaven is a mighty inspiration to good. Christians cannot do without either. God has so fashioned human nature that it cannot attain to any worthwhile goals without both the goals of fear and the incentives of hope. This is especially true of the final and all embracing destiny that all were made to attain.

A great many obstacles to the thought of heaven must be overcome by Christians of today. The obstacles arise from the attitudes of thousands around them, who have given up or never possessed faith in Christ, who have been betrayed into a renunciation of their thinking powers, and who have, as a result, built up a way of living for themselves in which the thought of heaven plays no part. They are a sorry lot, for whom life becomes more mysterious day by

day. They are part of a great puzzle, the key to whose solution they have never been given or have thrown away.

Some never think about heaven because they profess to disbelieve or doubt more fundamental truths about man, such as survival after death, immortality, a personal relation to God. Some of these in turn have just never given a thought to such truths. Their education never referred to them, and their minds were never developed beyond an ability to count money, to choose clothing and food, and to keep score at a baseball game.

Others, such as scientists, historians and so-called philosophers in universities, who have accepted like children the anti-religious clichés of scientists, historians and so-called philosophers who went before them, have thought about immortality and heaven only to scoff at them as fables. The sterility of their minds is best revealed by the fact that they cannot even distinguish the figures of speech that religious poets have used to describe heaven from the essential

happiness it promises to give. "Who wants to play a harp forever?" they ask scornfully. Or they say: "The idea of singing songs forever, which is the Christian's idea of heaven, is utterly boring to us." Such comments are the mark of empty and vapid minds.

There are many more who never think about heaven because they have wrapped themselves up completely in the dream of making a Paradise out of this world. This is a strange phenomenon. If nothing else, the universal fact of death, and the unpredictability of its summons, make it a pipe-dream. But they go on dreaming. Humanitarians keep telling them that they are about to eliminate the possibility of war. Divorce courts keep giving them a chance to try out new husbands and wives. They live, grow old or sick, and die, and go down into history as but the latest examples of human beings who lived on a futile and empty dream.

Truths About Heaven

Because heaven is so important for all human beings, indeed, because it is the only important goal to be kept before them, there are here presented the four major truths about heaven that Christians recognize in reason and accept on divine faith. It is hoped that this outline will not only fortify those who believe in heaven and have not been thinking enough about it, but it will also fall into the hands of some of those who have never known anything about heaven.

1.

Heaven is a state of perfect and eternal happiness whose reality is evident to reason, revealed by Christ, and intended by God to be won by all human beings as their final goal.

What, someone will ask, can reason tell a person about heaven? Reason, when not sidetracked by the influence of passion or corrupted by a perverse free will, can give a person a strong conviction of the existence of heaven, though it cannot of itself reach a knowledge of what the actual heaven God has created will be like.

Reason, that is, reaching conclusions from the evidence around one, can come to a certain knowledge of the existence of a personal, intelligent God. It can reach certainty on the fact that God is all-wise, all-powerful, all-good. It can know that God could never act foolishly, unwisely, purposelessly. Turning to human nature, reason can perceive the spirituality of man's soul, and through that, the immortality to which it is destined. It can ascertain that the mind and will of man were made for perfect knowledge and perfect love, the sum of which is perfect happiness. It can see that this perfect knowledge and perfect love are unattainable in this world.

Therefore, returning to the thought of the wisdom, power and goodness of God, reason can argue the fact that He must have created a place or a state wherein these obvious goals of the nature of man can be attained. There would be

no wisdom in God if He created any object for a definite purpose, evident in the object itself, and then made it impossible for that purpose to be attained. Aristotle, perhaps the greatest natural thinker the world has ever known, which means one who used his reason without having access to any of the revelations of God to man, cried out when he was dying: "Cause of all causes, save me." Implicit in that cry was a recognition of God, of immortality, of some kind of heaven, and at the same time his reason's recognition of the fact that there was a fate from which a man had to be saved.

Revelations

But this matter is so important, and man is so inclined to misuse or mistrust his reason, that God did not leave it to man's reason alone to reach the necessary conclusions. He revealed the fact and something of the nature of heaven directly through His divine Son, Jesus Christ. The whole mission of Christ on earth centered around the fact of heaven. He came, in His own words, to save that which was lost, which meant those who had lost the way to heaven. He came that all might have life and have it more abundantly, i.e., more abundantly than it can be had in this world, as abundantly as it can be had only in heaven. He came to say, in a thousand ways: "Your reward is in heaven."

Both reason and the words of Christ make it also clear that the heaven for which all were made must be earned by each individual.

It is not difficult to understand that, for a free creature of God, heaven would not be a state of happiness in the real sense of the word if it were forced on him, if he had nothing to say or do about it. It is the glory of his freedom and essential to his happiness than a man earn his rewards. This earning means paying a price, choosing between alternatives, avoiding an unhappiness proportionately as great as the happiness than can be won.

Of course, Christ revealed that man's power to earn heaven only began with his redemption from original sin and its effects through His death on the cross. But the earning still remained necessary. The final answer to all who would like to think that Christ paid the whole price for men's salvation was given by Christ Himself in these words: "Not every man that saith to me: Lord, Lord! shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father, only he shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

2.

Heaven means rescue and escape from eternal unhappiness, and the eternal absence of all sorrow and pain.

It is necessary to approach the thought of what heaven will be like in a negative way. What does one escape by reaching heaven? What will one be spared from forever if he succeeds in winning the reward that God wants him to attain?

Christ used a number of significant synonyms to express, in a negative way, "the one thing nec-

essary" that is to be sought by all. He called it "redemption," "salvation," "liberation," "restoration," "resurrection," "incorruption." Every one of these words represents, in one way or another, emergence from a sorry state, from a miserable and unhappy lot. The man who finds the way to heaven is redeemed from captivity to Satan; he is saved from the eternal fires of hell; he is liberated from hopelessness and despair; he is restored to a hope and happiness he had lost; he is raised from death to life; he exchanges the corruption of the body for the incorruption of the saints in glory. From each of these phrases, therefore, one can take much to think about concerning heaven.

While the attainment of heaven raises one from a state of misery and unhappiness, it also places one in a state in which there will not be even any passing, momentary, recurring reasons for sorrow. St. John expresses this wonderful truth in these poetic words of his Apocalypse: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor grieving, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things have passed away."

Only, of course, when one has attained heaven will this promise be fulfilled. But it affords frequent and compelling opportunities for thoughts about heaven in this world. It is this that gives to the mind of man an explanation of the problem of evil and suffering that is adequate for the bearing of any

catastrophe. If there is a heaven, a heaven that will last forever, a heaven that must be earned, a heaven in which no one will ever have cause for mourning or grieving, then not even a long lifetime of uninterrupted suffering on earth is too great a price to pay for it. Such a price is rarely demanded of anyone by God. But who could say it would be too much if it truly earned a billion years of unclouded joy? But a billion years do not represent even the beginning of heaven.

Thoughts of Heaven

It is therefore the thought of heaven that comes to true Christians in the midst of the sorrows they must endure and the hardships that arise from loyal obedience to God. Have you been stricken with illness in what people call the best years of life? Don't fret. You shall have billions of years of perfect health, with a body in its prime, if you do not turn against God. Has your home been invaded by death, which took away in most untimely fashion your mother, your husband or wife, your child? Don't grieve without hope. You shall have uncounted years of perfect companionship if you don't fail to reach heaven. Are you tempted to offend God in your married life, by infidelity, by sinful birth-control, in order to be sure of a few good years of pleasure or prosperity? What a fool you would be to succumb, when you thereby gain so little and lose so much—an eternity of love without shadow and security without worry! St. Paul, who suffered much for Christ, put all

this briefly when he said: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."

3.

Heaven is the full and positive enjoyment of all the powers and parts with which human nature is endowed.

While it is impossible to experience on earth anything like the joys of heaven, it is not difficult to know in what they will consist. St. Paul said: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man to conceive what things God has prepared for them that love Him." While this is a negative statement, there is a positive element implicit in it also. It reveals that heaven is something for the eyes, for the ears, for the heart, for all the sublime faculties with which man is endowed. To catch glimpses of the joy of heaven, a person has only to recognize the nature of his own yearnings, and the character of the things that partially fulfill his yearnings. Then, if he adds to this the thought of what Christ has made him heir to by elevating his nature to kinship with God, by participation in the divine nature, he will have convictions about heaven that no conceivable future good of earth will ever be able to compete with as motives for action.

It does not require learned psychological insight to perceive that all the joys that human nature was made to know center around two things. One of these is the appre-

hension and appreciation of beauty; the other is union of the heart with others through love. Every joyous experience that is ever known on earth springs from either of these two sources. But only heaven will bring them to their fullest, all-satisfying best.

Human nature has many faculties that thrill to the vision of beauty. The eyes, to the grandeur of nature's scenery; the ears to the strains of music; the memory to the recalled visions of the past; the imagination to new combinations of the elements of beauty that have been seen in various objects; and, at work through all these others, and thrilling by itself to the splendor of truth wherever seen, the intellect that makes man the image of God. It is a truism to say that no man ever sees enough of beauty or learns enough of truth to satisfy him in this world. The vision of the most gorgeous sunset, the memory of the most perfect scene, the sudden rapturous grasp of the long concealed and magnificent truth, always leaves him thirsting for something more. What that something more is Christ has taught clearly. It is the Beatific Vision which is the essence of heaven.

This is the final satisfaction of all man's restless quest of beauty that will come when he gazes directly into the infinite beauty of God, and sees all the infinite varieties of lesser beauty and all the intricate intertings of truth as in its source there. When he attains that, he will never know again the restlessness of looking for something more.

The enjoyment of beauty is followed or accompanied in human nature by the delights of love. Men and women have a variety of appetites that seek the embrace and possession of what is not only beautiful but good. Some of these appetites he has in common with the brute creation. As brute animals die and become extinct, so in heaven the purely material appetites will in a sense be extinct, or rather submerged in the unspeakable satisfaction of the higher appetites for love.

Man's Search

The yearning of the human heart for perfect love is evident from the beginning to the end of life on earth. The greatest joys of life on earth are the joys of love. But they never reach completeness on earth; they are never without the shadows of misunderstanding, the fears of change, the unhappy moments of separation and disagreement, the barriers that still leave areas of loneliness in the soul. The saddest of all human beings are those who know nothing about heaven, and who keep rushing about seeking a perfect love among created persons and things. They never find what they seek; they even lose what they were made to find by seeking it in the wrong objects.

Perfect, all-satisfying love requires a perfect object, and there is only one such perfect object. That is God. Wisely does God conceal His exquisite beauty from a man on earth because, once seen, it would leave him no longer free; he would be blindly bound to love

God as the animal is bound to obey the instincts fashioned into its nature by God. The winning of heaven therefore, means choosing, loving, serving God without the vision, with only faith in and intellectual knowledge of His supreme goodness and worthiness of love. But once the trial of freedom is over, once one has earned his reward, every vibrating desire for the perfect love of a perfect lover will find fulfillment. The vision of God will manifest that there is nothing outside of God worth loving, nothing to be loved by a human being except it be in God.

It is in this truth that one perceives how perfect will be the love of human friends, relatives, associates, in heaven. There they will seem as gifts of the goodness of God. There the love of human friends and relatives who helped each other reach heaven will be purged of all inconstancy, imperfection, changeableness. There new friends will be found and old will become new, in the ever luminous, ever varied, ever active circle that is bathed by the perfect love of God.

4.

The justified anticipation of heaven makes possible the only true peace and happiness one can experience in this world.

There are three elements that enter indispensably into the possession of peace of heart in this passing world. One by one they are these:

1) *The acceptance of life on earth as a test, a trial, a proving ground for something inconceiv-*

ably better. No worse mistake can be made by anyone than that of attaching the note of finality to life on earth. It is that mistake which leads to the uprisings of passion against reason, of one passion against another, of man against fellow-man, of nation against nation, of every type of conflict that is the contradiction of peace. People who know that they are but making a journey, that they are on their way to something better than the present life can offer, will not be inclined to quarrel with their fellow-travelers, nor to risk getting off the right road by succumbing to the attraction of ephemeral pleasures that offer themselves along the way.

2) *The thought of heaven, in joy and in sorrow.* It is the inevitable fate of those who do not think about heaven to think too much about the comforts, enjoyments, thrills, that are possible on earth. They cannot help themselves. They were made for happiness. If they exclude from their thinking the true happiness for which they were made, they will continually try to find substitutes in the created things around them. Theirs will be no true peace because what they want is not where they are looking for it.

3) *The realization that heaven has to be earned, through the acceptance of Christ's merits and the fulfillment of His will, and that it is worth a far greater price than anyone has ever been asked to pay for it.* It is only the justified anticipation of heaven that brings

peace to the heart. People who convince themselves that everybody will one day reach heaven, that God is too good to send anybody to hell, that there is no sin great enough to bar one from heaven, do not find peace. How can they, when they are contradicting their own nature, which is so fashioned that it can be satisfied only with a hope that is anchored to action and effort on the part of their free will? Those who try to believe that all will reach heaven some day, no matter how they live, usually end by denying that there is a heaven, just as they have all along denied that there is a hell.

What Heaven Means

The justified anticipation of heaven, which is the essence of hope, means two things. It means dependence on the merits and promises of Christ the Redeemer, and the use of the spiritual means that He devised as channels through which the saving merits of His death flow into the soul. It also means following Him in obedience, carrying a cross with Him in resignation trying to grow into a likeness of Him by the practice of all the virtues. He modeled for the world. Hope is for those who have accepted a Savior who did for them what they could not do for themselves, and who do the things that He demanded of all who accept Him as a Redeemer. Heaven is for such as these, and peace on earth that can spring from no other anticipation.

WHAT THE LAST ANOINTING DOES FOR THE DANGEROUSLY SICK



When I come to die, above everything else, I want somebody to tell me gently yet firmly about the journey I am about to make. I want to be warned in good time. I do *not* want anybody around me who is going to say, "Cheer up, old man. There isn't a thing wrong with you that a little rest won't cure. You just lean back and go to sleep, you lucky dog, and you'll be as fit as a fiddle in the shake of a dog's tail." No, I don't want anybody like that at the foot of my bed as the darkness begins to descend upon me which, I hope, will be the prelude to the dawning of the light.

If a doctor is there, O.K. Doctors have their important place in life as well as at the end of life. If the doctor is my friend—and I have many friends in the medical profession—he can help me keep my wits in shape for the thinking I will be wanting to do before I lose my wits entirely. And he can talk to me while I await the coming of the Lord.

But the thing that I want most of all in the declining moments of my human sojourn is the holy

anointing—the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. I am not so proud as to believe that the legs of my soul are stout enough merely through the training that I have given them to carry me over the last peaks that stand between me and eternity and over which I must climb without stumbling or slipping

if I am to arrive home safely. I need help—all the help I can get. And I know that that help is afforded me in the blessed anointing of the priest. I would be a fool if I did not take advantage of it. And my relatives and friends would be my greatest enemies if they refused to let me have it when actually it would be the only thing that could really help me.

There is more to Extreme Unction than ordinarily meets the eye.

When a bad accident, like a train wreck or an airplane crash, takes place here in America, the daily papers, in telling the story, invariably say that a Catholic priest hurried to the scene to administer the last rites of the Catholic Church to the severely injured and the dying. The daily papers never explain just what the priest does when he

administers the last rites, or what these last rites are and what they are meant to accomplish. The whole thing is surrounded with mystery.

Whatever they are, they must be very important, for all Catholics want to receive them before they die. Priests will crawl into burning buildings and under over-turned locomotives and through heavy barrages of exploding shells (in time of war) to make sure that they do receive them. Priests are expected to risk their lives to give the last rites to dying Catholics. Thank God, not only do they risk their lives, but oftentimes they sacrifice them in order to fulfill this sacred charge. That is how important the priest considers the last rites to be.

Last Rites

It is not because priests are particularly heroic that these heroic deeds are done. Priests as a group of men are no more heroic than any other group of men. They too can be afraid. They do not only give the last rites in the midst of serious danger, because there is no danger great enough to scare or stop them. They give the last rites in the midst of grave danger because of the effects that the last rites can have upon a body that is dying and upon a soul that is about to enter eternity.

Jesus Christ instituted Extreme Unction (this is the principal part of the "last rites") as one of the seven sacraments when He was here on earth. There is no record in the Gospel of His institution of this sacrament. This does not mean that Christ did not institute it Himself. There are many things that Christ

did during His life that are not recorded in the other inspired books—in St. Paul or St. James. The epistles of the Bible are just as inspired as the Gospels. If Extreme Unction is explained in one of the epistles, it is because the apostles received it by word of mouth from Our Lord, and were told to teach it to the whole world. Extreme Unction is clearly mentioned by St. James.

Ancient Rite

These are the words of St. James, found in Chapter 5, verse 14: "Is any man sick amongst you? Let him send for the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him."

Could there be anything clearer than that, as to what Christ wants the Church to do when her children are approaching the end of their life on earth? The Catholic Church has been anointing the dying from the very beginning of her history, which was the time of the apostles. Men like Tertullian, Origen, St. Ignatius, St. Augustine, and a host of other teachers and writers, all of whom lived during the first four centuries of the Church's existence, attest to the sacrament of the last anointing.

There was one Christian in the 4th century, Hypatius by name, who accomplished wonders of healing by applying a certain oil to the body of a sick man or woman brought before him. But when it

came to the holy anointing of the dying, "he called the Father Abbot," as one of his contemporaries wrote, "for Hypatius was not a priest and the Father Abbot was."

Apparently there was a real distinction between what a layman could do for a dangerously sick person and what a priest could do. The oil used by the layman Hypatius and the oil used by the priest Abbot were two entirely different things. The former might have been like our use of Lourdes water today, while the latter was the sacred ceremony that could be carried out only by one empowered by God through ordination to do so.

What Is Extreme Unction?

What does Extreme Unction actually do? It does two things, as the text of St. James explains.

It can help the sick to get better. There is no promise that it will *always* help the sick to get better. Sometimes it will, for St. James says, "And the prayer of faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up." This is not merely a vague word of comfort, like that of the man who consoles his friend who has just been given the sad word that he is filled with cancer, with the statement, "Don't worry; you'll be O.K. In a couple of months you'll be as good as new." There is more to the promise of St. James than that.

Every doctor who has a sufficiently large practice to enable him to draw conclusions will assert that on more than one occasion a patient of his who was desperately ill and in an almost hopeless condition

rallied amazingly after the anointing of the priest, and eventually recovered entirely. Such cases are a matter of record for anyone who wishes to investigate them.

Those who do not believe in Extreme Unction will say that all recoveries of this kind can be traced to suggestion or to mysterious natural causes that are as yet unknown. Let them. The Catholic Church knows that Extreme Unction can, if God so wills, cure an incurably sick man because it has the infallible Christ on its side who said, "And the Lord will raise him up." It is not surprised when the stories of cures come back to it. And it is not distressed when men rise up and deny the validity of the cure as something supernatural or due to supernatural means.

A Great Aid

Extreme Unction does more than occasionally cure the sick. It helps people to die in such a way as to be ready to go to heaven when God's judgment is over. This is the most wonderful thing that can happen to a man—to die without fear of the new world that lies just beyond the last breath and the final blessing.

There is little doubt in the assertion that the time of dying is the most vitally important in a person's life. It is a tremendously mysterious time. It means moving into a country about which not too much is known. It means putting in an appearance before a court at which an account will be given of every thought, word and action of life. It means the beginning of an

eternity of awful pain or an eternity of ecstatic happiness.

The big thing, the essential thing, is to die well, that is, when it is all over, to be greeted with a smile by the powerful Master who is in charge of eternity. Extreme Unction helps to bring this about. How? *Extreme Unction can take away sin!* This is not an invention of the Catholic Church. It is the teaching of Christ, as reported by St. James. What does St. James say? "If the sick man be in sins, they shall be taken away from him." Does that mean that the sick man does not have to go to confession, that all he has to do is allow himself to be anointed? No. If the sick man can go to confession, he must go to confession. The anointing will do him no good if maliciously he refuses to go to confession. In fact, if a man refuses to go to confession when he can easily go, the priest is forbidden to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Emergencies

But here is the case of a man who *cannot* go to confession. He intended to go to confession, but before he could do so he had a heart attack. He is now lying in the place where they carried him and he is totally unconscious. Tragic to relate, he is in the state of mortal sin. Is there any chance for him in case he does not return to consciousness before he dies? Yes, there is.

Extreme Unction is for people who find themselves in just such dangerous predicaments. If this man, before he slipped into uncon-

sciousness, realized the precariousness of his position and called out to God in an act of contrition (even though it was an act of imperfect contrition, that is, contrition based on the fear of God's punishments), that would be enough, if it were joined with the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, to take away the sin and permit the man to go to heaven.

God's Mercy

This is the power that the priest has as he stands at the bedside of the dying man. He can elicit no act from him now because he is no longer conscious. He cannot hear his confession and give him the unconditional absolution that is given after an ordinary good confession. But Christ designed a sacrament for this very situation. It is this sacrament that the priest administers. He applies the holy oil to the senses, one after another. And as he makes the sign of the cross with each anointing, he cries out to God for mercy on the soul of the dying man.

But the cry for mercy is not merely the prayer of an individual, even though the individual be a priest. It is the power of heaven put into operation. It is the key to the storehouse of God's grace. It is a divine sacrament working as God intended it to work at the end of a man's life when there is no other possibility of the man's going to heaven.

But it is more than a means whereby unconfessed but repented sins are taken away, even though the dying person be unconscious

and unable to confess. It is a great boon to those who are in the state of grace, whether they be conscious or unconscious. It provides abundant strength for overcoming the temptations through which the devil may try to win the soul at the very end. It takes away the vestiges of venial sin that may yet cling to the soul, and removes debts of atonement that may still be owed for past sins. It brings to the soul a special grace designed exactly for the moment of death (if it be God's will that death be the end of this illness), that makes death a glorious, supernaturally meritorious surrender of oneself into the hands of God. These are the many reasons that make every Catholic eager to receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction before he dies.

The Anointing

The administration of Extreme Unction is very simple.

The priest is called to the side of the sick person in good time, not after unconsciousness has set in, but, if it be possible, while the senses are still capable of operation. He has oil, consecrated by the bishop during the services of Holy Week, in a tiny golden container. He dips the thumb of his right hand into the oil and makes the sign of the cross over the sense that he is anointing while he says the words, "Through this holy unction and by the mercy of God may the Lord forgive you the sins that you have committed through the sense of sight." And so he does with all the other senses—hearing, smell, taste, touch. The symbolism of the

ceremony is that just as sin is committed through the instrumentality of the senses, so sin is taken away through the anointing of the senses with the cleansing oil of the holy sacrament.

But, of course, we now know that there is much more to it than mere symbolism. There is the assurance of absolute assistance at a time in life when friends, money, position, even family and dear ones are helpless to give us what we may need—the forgiveness of Almighty God. To be anointed at a time like that is worth more than all the wealth and power of the world combined.

What To Do

You can see, therefore, why I am so anxious to be anointed when I come to die and why I am so opposed to the practice current in some circles of allowing death to come to one who is loved without so much as a hint that it is even on the way. This is a brutal practice. I pray that it may not be exercised on you or me.

If you are near when this fateful day comes to me, go to the phone and call up the priest. Tell him that I have asked to be given everything that he is capable of giving. That I want the Lord in Holy Communion. That I want the Extreme Unction. That I want the last and final blessing. When I go out of this life I want to go out with all the Church can give me. I want the path swept clean between my bedside and the pearly gates. I know that so it will be if I receive what God has offered the critically sick.

WHAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DOES FOR PEOPLE AT DEATH

The remark has been made, presumably by a man who knew he was very close to death: "Other religions may be pleasant enough to live in, but the Catholic faith is by far the best to die in."

By which he doubtless meant that the consolations offered by the Church at the hour of death to its members make it particularly and especially appreciated at that time.

One might indeed suppose that any religion deserves to stand or fall in virtue of its attitude toward death. If I meet with a religion which is vague in its understanding of what death means, hesitant in telling me how immediately to prepare for death, and nebulous in its pronouncements as to what will happen after death, I can scarcely feel that it merits much confidence. If the trumpet bloweth an uncertain sound, who shall hear it?

The Catholic Church has a very clear and definite understanding of what death means, and this is reflected in a special way in the prayers and ceremonies with which it surrounds one of its children immediately before and after death. These are the prayers contained in



the so-called "last rites:" Viaticum, Extreme Unction, the last blessing, and the specific prayers to be said during the last agony. There is the Office of the Dead, a collection of psalms and other excerpts from Scripture found in the breviary, and usually chanted by priests over the remains of one of their deceased fellow-priests. Lastly, there is the beautiful Requiem Mass, with its accompanying benedictions and prayers.

In the first place, the Catholic Church does not try to gloss over the reality that death is a difficult and may even be an ugly ordeal. One of the great hypocrisies of our age is the attempt to disguise and camouflage death. The sick man with only a few hours to live must not be told of his desperate condition. His weeping relatives, standing around his bed, stare at him with cruel helplessness as his soul slips into eternity.

Now the true Catholic attitude toward death is much more stern and realistic. It is built on the basic truth that one of the most important duties of every human creature is to bow down before the will of

God, his Creator. Death is the dramatic and final expression of God's will for us here on earth. To accept it, with all its pains and terrors, is the supreme act of resignation beneath the hand of God. It is the final holocaust of self-will, by which a man courageously looks death squarely in the face, having prepared wisely for its coming.

How We Pray

This stern and sober acceptance of death is reflected in all the prayers used by the Church for its deceased members. It appears perhaps most clearly in the Office of the Dead, of which we have already made mention. The very keynote of this Office is found in the two psalms: *De Profundis* (129) and *Miserere* (50). "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee," the psalmist exclaims, "O Lord, Lord, hear my voice," and then: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy."

All nine of the Lessons, or readings from Scripture, found in this Office are taken from the book of Job in the Old Testament, and one can scarcely find anywhere a more realistic summary of man's mortality.

"Spare me, Lord, for my days are nothing; . . . behold now I sleep in the dust, and if you seek me in the morning, I shall not be . . ."

"Thy hands have made me and fashioned me wholly round about, and dost thou then cast me down headlong on a sudden?"

"Man, born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a

flower and is destroyed, and fleeth like a shadow and never continueth in the same state. The days of man are short, and the number of his months is with Thee! Thou has appointed his bounds which cannot be passed.

"I have said to rottenness, thou art my father; to worms, my mother and sister. Where is now my expectation, and who considereth my patience?"

To meditate properly on passages such as these is to savor the dank smell of mortality, to contemplate it with all the accompaniments of anguish and natural fear and distress. And this is exactly what the Church would have its members do from time to time, for the good of their souls. "Remember thy last end," it keeps telling them, "and thou wilt never sin."

Christian Hope

Yet even while thus it requires of them that they contemplate death, it always tempers the meditation with Christian hope. The patriarch Job, many centuries before Christ, even in the midst of all the miseries which God, to test him, permitted to befall him, could cry triumphantly:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God . . . This is the hope laid up in my bosom."

This beautiful expression of hope has been adopted by the Church as a kind of motto; the passage itself

appears in the Office of the Dead, in the eighth lesson of Matins. Almost as if in direct answer to the cry of Job are the words of Christ spoken to Martha on the death of her brother Lazarus:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live, and everyone that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die forever."

Requiem Mass

This striking passage is found in one of the antiphons of the Office of the Dead; it is embodied in the gospel read at one of the several Requiem Masses; and it is just about the last word spoken by the Church over the body of one of its members as it is lowered into the grave.

Around the passing of the Christian soul into eternity the Church has over the years built up some of its most beautiful and tender prayers and invocations. They are, we may say, all too little known and appreciated by those (even Catholics) who, living by the shallow philosophy of the world, refuse to contemplate death.

Consider the Catholic who is taken seriously ill. At once all the resources of the Church are brought into play to help him in this tremendously important period of his life.

To his bedside comes the priest, and the sick man makes his confession, humbly acknowledging his faults and sins, and expressing his sorrow for them, whereupon the priest, by the power given to him,

forgives the penitent in the name of Christ.

The priest then (if the sick man is able to receive it) administers Holy Viaticum, which literally translated means "with you on the way." "Receive, brother, (or sister)" the priest says, as he places the sacred Host upon the sick man's tongue, "the Viaticum of the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and may He guard you from all your enemies, and lead you to life everlasting."

After this comes the anointing and the beautiful prayers of the sacrament of Extreme Unction over each of the senses: "Through this holy anointing and His most sweet mercy may the Lord forgive you any sins you have committed through this sense."

Extreme Unction is followed by the last blessing as it is called, by which the Church, on condition that the sick man is entirely resigned to God's Will in regard to his death, grants him a plenary indulgence by which the remains of sin on his soul may be removed.

God's Peace

Let us suppose, now, that the course of the illness remains unchecked, and death appears imminent. The priest again comes to the home, and as he enters the sick room, he sprinkles holy water over the bed and all around, saying as he does so: "Peace be to this house and all who dwell therein." On the table beside the bed is a crucifix, with two blessed candles burning, and the priest presents the crucifix to the dying man, that he may kiss

the wounds of Christ as an expression of faith and love.

Then follows the litany of the dying, which the priest leads, and the family of the dying man, kneeling around the bed, answer with the responses. Each of the three divine persons is solemnly invoked, then the intercession of the saints is implored, each of them in turn, that the passage into eternity may be an easy one for this Christian soul.

The Prayers

Now let us suppose that the death agony of the sick man has begun. In this solemn moment, as those kneeling around the bed watch the soul fluttering like a moth against the bars of the cage which enclose it, about to escape into the pure air of eternity, the priest reads the beautiful prayer:

"Depart, O Christian soul, out of this sinful world, in the name of God, the Father Almighty, who created you; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered and died for you; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified you; in the name of the glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God; in the name of blessed Joseph, the illustrious spouse of the same Virgin; in the name of the angels and archangels: in the name of the thrones and dominations: in the name of the principalities and powers: in the name of the cherubim and seraphim: in the name of the patriarchs and prophets: in the name of the holy apostles and evangelists: in the name of the holy martyrs and

confessors: in the name of the holy monks and hermits: in the name of the holy virgins and of all the saints of God. May your dwelling place this day be in heaven, the home of peace. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

As the death agony continues, the priest reads other ancient prayers, begging God that the dying man may have comfort and strength and peace of conscience:

"Deliver, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant from every danger of being lost, and from all temptations, pains and tribulations. Amen.

"Deliver, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant as Thou didst deliver Noah from the flood. Amen.

"Deliver, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant as Thou didst deliver Peter and Paul out of prison. Amen.

"Remember not, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the sins and ignorances of his youth, but according to Thy mercy, be mindful of him in Thy heavenly glory. Let the heavens be opened to him, and the angels rejoice with him."

Then, at the very moment of death, as the dying man with his last glance, looks upon the crucifix, held before his eyes, and murmurs with his last breath the holy name of Jesus, the priest repeats the last cry of Christ upon the cross:

"Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

Having done everything possible for the soul in its last struggles before death, the Church is now solicitous to free him from purgatory as quickly as charitable pray-

ers might be able to bring this about. Around the untenanted body, soon to return to dust, the rosary will be said by his fellow-parishioners, and then, at a suitable time, the remains will be conducted into the church and placed before the altar, in order that the beautiful official prayers of the Church may be offered up.

"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord,"—thus does the Church begin this last solemn service for its deceased member, "and let perpetual light shine upon him." In the poignant chant which has come down through the centuries for use on such sad occasions, it lifts up its intercessory voice, now appealing for the dead, now reminding those left behind to profit by the lesson of death.

"Guilty, lo I groan with fear
Whilst with shame Thy
throne I near.
Thou, O God, my crying
hear.
Who didst bend to Mary's
grief,
Didst accept the contrite
thief,
Wilt not grudge me my
relief."

The solemn hammer-strokes of the immortal, *Dies Irae* give way to the Gospel's unmistakable promise of immortality by Christ:

"Amen, amen I say to you, the hour cometh and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."

And this most certainly means, as the Preface of the Mass goes on

to explain it, that "they who are saddened by the certain necessity of dying should be comforted by the promise of eternal life to come. For the life of the faithful is changed, not destroyed, and when the home of this earthly life is dissolved, an everlasting dwelling in heaven shall be gained."

"The Resurrection"

And so on through the Mass, with the plea often repeated: "Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord," and at the end of Mass, the last prayers and blessing of the corpse in church before priest and mourners accompany the remains to the cemetery.

Thus—sadly, yet, in St. Paul's words, "not sorrowing as those who have no hope," relatives and friends of the dead Christian watch as his remains are brought to his last resting place on earth. Once more is heard the stirring reminder of immortality:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he be dead, shall live."

Once more and for the last time the mourners are reminded of their own mortality: "Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that while we here lament the departure of Thy servant from this life, we may always remember that we are most certainly to follow him. Give us grace to prepare for that last hour by a good and holy life..."

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