

# LIFE EVERLASTING

A Course of Sermons

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BY

MOST REV. TIHAMER TOTH

TRANSLATED BY

V. G. AGOTAI

EDITED BY

REV. NEWTON THOMPSON, S.T.D.

B. HERDER BOOK CO.

15 & 17 SOUTH BROADWAY, ST LOUIS, MO.

AND

33 QUEEN SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.

1940

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*NIHIL OBSTAT*

*Sti. Ludovici, die 20. Sept., 1940*

*F. J. Holweck,  
Censor Librorum*

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*Sti. Ludovici, die 21. Sept., 1940*

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*Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton and New York*

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## I

### BELIEF IN LIFE EVERLASTING

THIS declaration is not only the conclusion of our Creed and crown of our belief, but also its foundation and support. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." With this triumphant assurance the Christian Creed ends. On this also the whole Christian religion is erected.

Life everlasting. What a promise and hope beyond imagination! Unsurpassed bliss! How much encouragement, how much consolation, how much strength and energy emanate from this belief!

Life everlasting. If there really is life everlasting, then it is not such a dreadful tragedy, that my earthly life is continual pain and suffering. If there is life everlasting, then it is not such an insupportable burden, that I have to live my earthly life misunderstood and unloved. If there is life everlasting, then I am not appalled that death should deprive me of this earthly life. If there is life everlasting, then in this earthly life only one thing is important: to insure by my present life that blissful life everlasting. O yes, if there is life everlasting.

But what if there is none?

Is it certain that there is? Can we say the last words of the Creed with absolute certainty: "I believe in life everlasting"? Is this not a mere fancy? Is it not a deceptive dream? An unfounded longing?

I should now like to consider the problem of life everlast-

ing in all its details because in this way earthly life will be seen in quite another light, and its every manifestation will gain quite a different meaning.

The King of eternal life, our blessed heavenly Father, grant that in the souls of all who reflect with us upon the question of life everlasting, this belief may become unfaltering. And may He grant that we attain a blissful eternity by the goodness of our earthly lives so that the inscription on the tombstone of a great French Catholic writer, Louis Veuillot (1813-1883), composed by himself before his death, may be applicable to all of us.

When I have breathed my last in prayer,  
A cross erect upon my grave;  
And on my tombstone write these words:  
"He lived believing; now he knows."

## I

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION

A. If we consider the history of the human mind, we see that since earliest times two opposing views of life have divided mankind into two main groups.

1) These two groups are so opposed to each other that they can never hope to reach an agreement.

"Enjoy yourself to the fullest, for life is short and after it there is nothing." This is the motto of one group. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16: 26.) This is the motto of the other. And all of us must decide which motto to choose.

Our decision—on which side to take our stand—will affect our whole life. If there is no world to come, no eternal life, then we are foolish to deny ourselves anything whatever on this earth. If there is no world hereafter, then let us enjoy

this brief span of earthly life to the utmost. St. Paul said: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15: 19). On the other hand, if we look forward to a world to come and a life everlasting, we must do everything to attain life: that everlasting life, that blissful everlasting life.

2) The great Pascal was right when he said: "The immortality of the soul is so important, it touches us so deeply, that we cannot remain indifferent to this question unless we have lost all interest in life. According as we have or have not hope of eternal blessings, all our acts and thoughts are directed into such divergent channels that in all common sense we cannot pursue our way without determining its direction from this highest point of view."

This is indeed the one and only decisive question for all men: Is there a world to come or is there none? A decisive question which we cannot evade. We cannot do what a certain soldier did who, poor fellow, had not learned to pray at home. But on the battlefield, amid a hail of bullets, he began to pray thus: "Dear God (if there is a God), save my soul (if I have a soul) that I may not go to hell (if there is a hell) but to heaven (if there is a heaven)." No, dear brethren, we cannot do this. We must all choose: Is there life everlasting or is there not?

B. How different our whole life will be if we believe in the hereafter; and how different it will be if we do not believe!

1) How different this earthly life will be! If we believe that this life is only a beginning and that before God's judgment seat the continuation of it awaits us, then there are no more insoluble life problems for us, earthly injustice does not crush us, we can endure even the hardest struggles. Yes, this earthly life has a purpose only if it has a continuation in life everlasting.

But if we do not believe in the next world? Then, like a thousand sphinxes, disaster and trials and sickness and death will grin at us in this life. Without belief in a life hereafter, our present life is unbearable torment. It is like a runaway locomotive rushing along the rails without any goal, until somewhere it plunges off the tracks and comes to a sudden and disastrous stop. Consider man as an immortal creature, and everything about him becomes great, everything is understandable. But take him as a being without immortal destiny, and dark clouds envelop his aimless paths.

2) If we believe in life everlasting, how different death is from what it is if we do not believe!

Death comes to the unbeliever as well as to the believer; but in the death of the two is all the difference between earth and heaven. The unbeliever clutches frantically at fleeting life with a pitiable, hopeless, spasmodic gesture of his trembling fingers. And the believer? As he approaches the end of his life, he becomes calmer and quieter; in his last confession he once more sets in order his account with almighty God and thus awaits the last solemn moment.

In the year 1890 when the great English convert, Cardinal Newman, felt that death was imminent, he sent everybody from his room with these words: "I can meet my end alone." What faith, what strength, what will-power! It is a real "euthanasia," "a good death," when we can say with the psalmist: "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me" (Ps. 22: 4).

"Hail, brother Death," St. Francis of Assisi cried triumphantly when he was told that he had not long to live. Truly above such a deathbed the tender light of the life to come already dawns gently, the light that makes Murillo's famous picture, "The death of St. Clare," so touchingly beautiful.



Dante once wrote that "life is a hastening toward death" (*Purgatorio*, canto 23). This is true: life is continual death; only in the last hour of life do we cease to die. This last moment comes also to him who has not believed in life everlasting. But, alas, then he is overtaken by "the deathbed tragedy" of which Jean Paul speaks. Because in that hour such a man fares as does a speculator on the Stock Exchange, who takes the latest report into his hand after a sharp decline in stocks, and is startled to see that all his shares have become worthless.

3) How different is our consolation in affliction if we believe in life everlasting! Sometimes consolation is utterly empty, banal. "I also had a mother, she died, too." Is this a consolation for us? Or: "Time will ease your sorrow." "We shall not forget her memory." "His death was so peaceful; he just fell asleep." No, no! Only the belief in life everlasting consoles us: that our dear one continues to live and that we shall see each other again. Thus we feel that "blessed are they that mourn"—that mourn like this—"for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5: 5).

O yes, this is consolation. How truly the renowned physicist of the past century, Robery Maye, writes: "A strong, scientifically founded faith in the individual continuation of the life of the soul and of the direction of human destiny by a higher power was my greatest comfort when I held the cold hand of my dying mother between my hands."

This is surely the truest philosophy of life: to appraise life from the viewpoint of death, and to view death by the light of life everlasting. Thus death becomes life's great regulator. To the sad and afflicted it says: Be patient; it will not last much longer. To the frivolous it says: Beware, everything comes to an end quickly. To the arrogant boaster it says:

Only wait; you will soon see what becomes of you. And to the conscientious struggler it says: Endure; in the end you will gain the reward of virtue.

After this, dear brethren, I need not further discuss whether our question is important or not.

## II

### MANKIND'S BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE

Let us note the interesting fact that never has a people lived on this earth, that did not believe in a future life.

A. However far back, even into prehistoric times, scholarly investigation extends, where we find traces of man we also find evidence of his belief in a life beyond the grave. What aroused this belief in a life after death? Undoubtedly the word of God resounding in the human soul. And what nourished this belief? The countless imperfections, injustices, and miseries of earthly life, to which only the perfection of eternal life can give the solution.

The extensive labor expended on the preparation of the tombs of prehistoric man speaks eloquently of this belief. Prehistoric man did not regard a corpse merely as something loathsome, to be hurriedly cast by the wayside and left to itself; on the contrary, it was an object of reverent care. That they lacked a clear idea of the soul and did not reflect upon it with the knowledge possessed by Christians, does not militate against the fact that the most primitive peoples believed in the reality of life after death. Therefore they placed food and weapons in the graves and sometimes killed the wives and slaves of the dead, that there should be someone to serve them in the next world.

B. If we consider the great historic races, we find every-

where belief in a life after death, of course in various and sometimes fantastic forms.

The Egyptian pyramids, sarcophagi, and inscriptions, prepared with much care and artistic feeling, speak of this belief. The Babylonian memorials, and the Olympus and Tartarus of the Greeks, speak of this, too.

"Death ends everything? What a pagan way of speaking," we say. But it is not a pagan way of speaking; the pagans did not speak like that.

Listen to Socrates reply when his friend Crito questions him before his death: "Have you any wish that we can fulfil? How shall we bury you?" "What do you say?" replied Socrates. "You will bury me? You can bury my body. But me you cannot bury." This reply calls to mind what is written on the cross on Gardonyi's grave in the citadel at Eger: "Only the body."

Cicero wrote a whole book on the immortality of the soul (*De immortalitate animae*). In one of his other works he reasons, with psychological insight, in this manner: "The greatest proof that nature herself silently acknowledges immortality is that the question of what will come after death, lies close to everyone's heart, indeed it lies very close to everyone's heart. . . . I wonder what all our great men can have thought, those great men who died for their country? Did they think that at the end of their earthly lives even their names would disappear? Without the hope of a continuation of life after death, not one of them would have died for his country. . . . Rooted in the soul, somehow or other, is the premonition, who would be so foolish as to live in continual weariness and among continual dangers? If, on the one hand, the general opinion is the voice of nature, and on the other hand, everyone in the world is agreed that there is something

that has reference to those who have departed this life, then we ought to make this opinion our own" (*Tusc. Disp.*, I, 14). Are these not interesting words from pre-Christian times?

C. We find the same opinion among the people living today. It is a fact well established, that we do not find a single people without a belief that death is but a gateway beyond which life in some form continues. If we consider the most distant peoples—the Lapps, the Eskimos, the Hottentots, the Zulus, the Patagonians—we find that each believes this truth in some form: on this earth we are pilgrims toward another home, where we shall live eternally.

Today we often hear that the Chinese are the least religious people in the world. But among them belief in life after death is so strong that almost their entire religion is connected with veneration for the spirits of deceased ancestors.

The sensual Mohammedan and the pious native of India, the highly educated Greek and the materialistic Roman, the primitive Teuton and the barbarous Scythian, the serious American Indian and the lighthearted South Sea Islander, the hot-blooded negro and the hardheaded Australian, the despised Hottentot and the uncivilized Fuegian: all of them believe in a future life and look forward to a reunion in the world to come.

What has ever been the universal belief of mankind springs from the depths of the human soul; it is the result of the primitive philosophy of the human mind.

No one can rightly object that for a long time mankind believed that the sun revolves round the earth. Man did, indeed, believe this, because his senses testified that such was the case; his senses deceived him. But when man believes in a future life, he believes *despite his senses*: he believes although his senses tell him nothing of all this; on the contrary, they seem opposed to it.

## III

## IS THERE A WORLD BEYOND?

We can, however, go still further with this argument.

A. Let us suppose, although it is not so, but let us suppose that we who believe in the next world cannot support our belief with stronger arguments than the arguments adduced by those who deny it. For the moment let us suppose that both assertions are equally uncertain and that, not even by a hairsbreadth, is it more certain that there is life everlasting than that there is none. Now I ask: Does not human wisdom demand that I should rather take my stand for belief in the world to come? Is it not wiser to reckon with a danger, even if it never happens, than to ignore it although it may happen?

People insure themselves against many things, do they not? They insure against fire. Do they insure because their house will certainly be burnt down? Of course not. They take out an insurance policy because their house may burn down, and in that case it is well for them to have it insured. They insure against accidents, against hail-storms, against theft. Are they certain that an accident will happen to them, that hail will damage their crops, that burglars will break into their house? No. But these things may happen.

Well, dear brethren, if we were in this position with regard to the next world: it may be that there is one, it may be that there is none—we are not, in fact, in this position; but let us suppose that we are—then would not sober common sense demand that we live our lives as though there were a world to come?

B. You must allow me to reason in such a very material way, because some people are impressed only by such arguments.

Let us take the worst case: I have lived as if there were a world beyond. I have taken great care of my morals, of my honor. Then I die. And then, in fact, there is nothing after this life. What have I lost? At best, I have lost the very doubtful joys of sinful earthly pleasures; but even then I have enjoyed the exalting sensation that accompanies one on the path of honor. If, on the other hand, there is a world to come, then I have gained everything.

Now let us take the other case: I have lived as if there were no world beyond, frivolously sipping life's sinful pleasures. I die. And it appears that really there is nothing beyond the grave. What have I gained? The long-forgotten deceptive joys of sinful pleasure. But if it appears that there is a world to come? What have I lost then? Everything! Everything! Forever!

"Dear Christian, how deceived you are, if heaven is a fairy tale," an unbeliever once said mockingly to a believer. But the latter replied: "O, dear atheist, how deceived you are, if hell is no fairy tale."

Yes, brethren, to live honestly is the smallest loss and the greatest gain. But to live in sin is the smallest gain and the greatest loss. Then ought we not to take our stand for the world to come, even if our arguments for it were as weak as the arguments of those that deny it?

But such is not the case. That death is not the terminus of life, but only a gateway through which we must pass and beyond which a more beautiful, more colorful, never-ending life awaits us, is equally witnessed to by the general conviction of mankind, by man's reasoning mind, and by divine revelation. So many and such strong arguments testify to this that we should have to deny the ability of the human mind to recognize truth, were we to doubt the reality of life beyond the grave.

My dear brethren. Ever since man has lived upon the earth he has always striven to prolong his life, if only by a short span. With what passionate eagerness he sought the elixir that would give him unending life! A Chinese legend relates that a certain emperor built a tower reaching to the skies; on the roof of the tower he erected a golden staff with a golden cup on its tip. With the clear dew thus gathered, he mixed a powder that was composed of precious jewels. He then drank this mixture, in the expectation that he would never die. What a vain experiment! What a foolish endeavor!

How much research has been undertaken by man in the study of this question! We have striven to know how we should nourish ourselves, how we should clothe ourselves, how we should construct our houses, how we should regulate our daily lives, merely that we may live longer. Yet, after all our endeavors, we have not been able to save our lives from the grave. Today the words of Job are still true: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed and fleeth as a shadow" (Job 14: 1 f.).

Yet there is one marvelous and quite certain "life-lengthener," if I may coin a word, not valid for a few years only or for a hundred or for a million, but forever: our holy Christian faith.

*Non omnis morior* ("I do not die entirely") said the great Latin poet Horace, writing of his own literary fame. But what he meant with regard only to his fame, we feel in the instinctive desire of all mankind for immortality, for life. I do not die entirely. I shall live after death. I believe in the resurrection of the body. I believe in life everlasting. Amen.

## II

### EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL

THE Catholic Creed concludes with these triumphant words: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." With the most unwavering firmness, we Catholics believe in the next life. Let us see upon what grounds we believe. What arguments support our contention? On two subsequent occasions we shall consider what Divine revelation and human reason have to say. But today let us examine the assertions of those who deny life everlasting because they deny that man has a soul.

Do some people, really, not believe in the existence of a soul?

Are there some whose faces are turned always earthward? Whose eyes are blindfolded, as it were? Who wander so hopelessly and aimlessly? And are such people to be found in large numbers?

Half a century ago such an attitude was common. At that time a benumbing tendency, that of materialism, held sway in natural science, in physics, unwilling to acknowledge anything in the world except matter, and endeavoring to explain everything in terms of matter. "There is no soul, only matter," was the refrain. "What until now has been called soul and spiritual phenomena consists of nothing but matter's most subtle manifestations. What is not material, does not exist. Therefore what we cannot perceive with our senses, that is, what we should have to believe, does not exist."

At that time the world resounded with such assertions.



Since then, however, much water has flowed under the bridges; and materialism, as a world-philosophy, belongs to the things of the past. That beside the material world—measurable, perceptible, and tangible to our senses—a wonderfully rich spiritual world also exists, transcending the material, is today denied only by those whose knowledge has remained on the plane of half a century ago.

But I am sorry to say, some such people may still be found. Now and then you may hear a remark about life everlasting that plainly comes from the rusty arsenal of materialism. Today, then, we will consider that science does not deny the existence of the soul, and that sound reasoning demands its existence.

## I

### THE ATTITUDE OF SCIENCE

Whoever asserts anything, may rightly be required to prove his assertion. Christianity asserts the existence of a world to come, a life beyond the grave. We shall see how many arguments there are to support this assertion. But what arguments are adduced by those who deny the existence of such a world?

Those who deny a future life generally refer to "science" with a superior gesture. "Belief in the existence of the soul and of a life beyond the grave is in opposition to science," they say with abounding self-confidence.

A. Surely we may ask them to tell us which science it is that contradicts this doctrine of our faith, that the human soul is immortal. Which science does this?

1) Perhaps the science of law? If the soul is immortal, if there is life after death, then do the laws of justice collapse, or do they not receive their highest sanction precisely through this belief?

2) Or philosophy? Perhaps by denial of life hereafter, we may more easily solve the enigmas of the world? Great truths, felt instinctively, seen clearly, considered certain, although man cannot prove them, lie latent within him. In this way he senses immortality. Mankind unanimously believes in life after death, although it cannot prove this by mathematical methods.

If, indeed, the belief in immortality, this belief which is rooted in the depths of the human heart, that immortality for which we yearn most eagerly from childhood to the grave, if this belief is nothing but a fancy, a fairy tale, and not truth, then no truth is to be found on earth.

3) Which science contradicts the belief in life everlasting? History? Mathematics? What law opposes the continued life of the soul? Someone replies: "Natural science. Natural science has proved that man consists of a body only; he has no soul. What we commonly call spiritual phenomena are nothing but functions of the brain. If, therefore, man has no soul, nothing is there to live on after the death of the body."

Those "modern" people who today still argue that biology can explain every spiritual phenomenon by the material processes of the body and that therefore man has no soul, do not realize that they are not at all modern and up-to-date, that they are behind the times. People spoke that way a few decades ago, at a time when a flood of material misconception denying the soul's existence inundated the scientific world. But let us, by way of example, quote a few lines from a recent number of an esteemed medical periodical (*Jo egeszseg*, 1931, pp. 191 f.).

"Let us imagine that science already enables us to look into the living, functioning brain and that we can not only measure its temperature but, in consequence of some wonderful progress made by science, we can also make the brain's mo-

lecular movements visible or at least calculable, and so take delight in observing their order and harmony. Even in such an event, however marvelous the sight would be, in no part of it could we find thought itself. We might possibly see vibrations, the change of position made by the molecules, the order of different movements, but thoughts, feelings, desires, plans, and the active, colorful life of the soul itself we could not see. Nor anything that even distantly resembles it. The anatomy of the brain does not show even a trace of thought."

And the same periodical continues: "According to Claude Bernard, the famous biologist, to assert that thought is a secretion of the brain, signifies just as much as if one were to say 'time is a secretion of the clock.'

"If the ego were nothing more than a mass of brain, if thought, determination, project, enthusiasm, joy, sorrow, judgment, knowledge, art, poetry, were nothing but biological circular motions of the atoms of the brain, then science would know which group of brain molecules thinks, which chemical group of atoms feels, which plans, which judges, which fears, which rejoices. In no way can anyone show how an immaterial spiritual something, such as thought and the entire colorful and variable spiritual life, originates from mere matter."

Yes, this is the up-to-date scientific way of thinking. We will now examine how thinking man came to this conclusion.

## II

### THE ATTITUDE OF REASON

"No life exists beyond the grave because, after the death of the body, nothing remains to live; no such thing as a soul exists. No one has ever yet held a soul in his hand. Man has

not a soul; only a brain. What we call soul is the functioning of the brain. A child's brain is small: its thoughts are also small. A man's brain is diseased: his thoughts are also sickly. A man's brain is old: his thoughts are also old. A man's brain dies: his thinking also dies." Those who deny the existence of the soul argue thus and do not realize how many errors they have uttered in one breath.

"No one has ever yet held a soul in his hand." Well, well, have you ever held a sunbeam in your hand? Have you ever held truth in your hand? Have you ever held an electric current in your hand?

"I have never actually held an electric current in my hand," you may say, "but I feel that it exists, because it heats and lights, and gives me a shock; I do not see the current, indeed, but I perceive its functioning."

Ah, then we are on the right path. Neither do we actually see the soul, but we perceive its functioning. That man is able to think and to will is a complete refutation of the arguments brought forward by those who deny the existence of the soul.

A. First, man's thinking faculty refutes them. Brain is soul, they say.

1) But what is brain? A mass of matter that can be weighed on the scales. And what is thought? What is love, enthusiasm, virtue, anger, sin, and the many other manifestations that we call the function of the soul? A spiritual something. Now solve the riddle if you can: how can matter bring the spiritual into existence? Who that denies the soul can answer this?

There is no spiritual soul in us, only matter. Then who understands our spiritual thinking faculty? If I fill a sack with matter, let us say with apples or with potatoes, however large the sack it will at length be full and will hold nothing more, because it is matter. But my soul, my thinking faculty,

can receive impressions of the external world into itself without limit, and it will never be full, because it is not matter.

During the functions of my soul in earthly life it has need of my body as of an implement. On the other hand, it has reflective functions that cannot be explained as mere processes of matter. Who can explain, in material terms, the abstract and universal concepts, during the creation of which the soul completely withdraws from things perceptible to the senses, and forms universal ideas that cannot be found in reality? Or when it establishes laws that are valid in the material world, but that have nothing material about them. I even construct entire branches of science—for instance, mathematics—that are of an altogether immaterial nature. Man is able to do this only because in him lives a soul that is not matter, but spirit. I confess I could never believe—yet those who deny the existence of the spiritual soul must believe—that, for instance, when Michelangelo created his matchless statue of Moses or designed the cupola of St. Peter's, only his hand, his pencil, and his chisel were at work. Only these, and nothing more. On the contrary, I believe that a much more important work was accomplished by the artist's soul that conceived and worked out the idea of the masterpiece.

2) My logical thinking faculty raised me above all the creatures of earth. How magnificent are the brilliant stars on a quiet summer evening! But a single human thought is worth more than a whole galaxy of stars. Only man, this little part of the universe, creates abstract ideas, rises in thought to transcendental heights, and reflects upon the infinite. Yet he could not think of the infinite unless something infinite lived in him, his soul; just as the eye could not perceive light unless it were created for light.

3) "We have no soul, only a brain." How this is disproved

by human consciousness! If it were true, then man could not utter that magnificent, enigmatical, immeasurably profound word "I." The conscious sense of the ego, self-consciousness, designates man as a person and raises him above every other creature of earth.

How much time we might spend in reflecting on this little word "I"! Who is this "I" in me? Does my head think? No. But I think. Does my heart love? No. But I love. Who is this I? Has anyone seen it? No. No one. Has anyone heard it? No one. Yet it exists. From whom is it? From whom is this mysterious I in me? From the eternal I who said of Himself: "I am who am" (Ex. 3: 14), that is, whose essence is "to be."

The "I" is always the same in me, yesterday, years and years ago, therefore every conscious phenomenon in me must have a permanent basis. This feeling of the "I" is something of the consciousness that cannot be explained away by nerves and brain-substance.

4) "But without the brain there is no spiritual functioning," you may be told. And this is true in this earthly life. The brain plays the part of a telephone exchange. Every nerve leads to it, and there sits the operator that receives and sums up impressions. But in the telephone system, the wire is not what produces the thoughts, the conversations that pass over it. If the wire is faulty, the functioning of the telephone is faulty, too. Even though the operator may be sitting in the exchange, you cannot telephone. Nor can you if the operator leaves the exchange, even though the apparatus remains there. In like manner if our soul leaves our body, no longer will any thought be there, yet the brain remains where it was.

You see this little instrument before me. It is the microphone into which I am now speaking. An electric current runs through it, receives my every word, and broadcasts it into the ether. The microphone is the brain, I am the soul.

Brain is needed, the soul also is needed. But if this microphone is damaged, then I should speak in vain; no one outside the church would hear my words. I cannot communicate my thoughts to it. But can I say that the thoughts you now hear expressed are manufactured by the microphone? Most decidedly not.

Just so I cannot reach my distant listeners without the microphone. If the microphone is impaired, let us say if it is "ill," they may hear my voice, but only faintly or accompanied by crackling noises. So if a man's brain is decrepit or ill, then it is able to transmit the soul's thoughts only in a faulty manner. On the other hand, even a healthy brain is useless if the soul leaves it; just as the best microphone might be here, but if I go away from it, it will not transmit my voice. With poor tools not even the best sculptor can work well: nor can he without any tools at all. Yet who would say that the tool is the artist? But that is what is said by those who declare that brain is soul.

"But you know," someone may say, "the behavior of these infantile, sickly, or aged brains still confuses me. The train of thought of these persons with undeveloped brains or with brains that have become diseased, is so foolish and sickly that we must explain everything with the brain. Where is the soul in these cases?"

Yet it is there, my brethren: a normal soul, not infantile or sickly human soul, is there. But it cannot express itself. Listen to this analogy. Two persons are seated in the same room. The one has the ear pieces of a simple detector radio-receiver on his head; in front of the other stands a six-tube super-radio. The room is full of the waves of hundreds and hundreds of broadcasting stations which knock and ask for admittance at both apparatuses. The one who has a delicate receiving apparatus hears many of them; but the man with

the crude detector sits there and hears nothing of the whole colorful mass of sound; at most he may hear a local station. Why does he hear nothing else? Because his receiving apparatus is weak. The infantile, undeveloped, or diseased brain can be compared to a weak radio receiver. There beside it is the transmitter, a soul neither infantile nor diseased; but it transmits the most beautiful programs in vain if no machine is at hand to receive them.

B. The contention of those who deny the existence of the soul is refuted, and the spirituality of the soul, that is, its immortality, is proved by its spontaneous activity.

1) Man is capable of willing in opposition to his desires of a material nature. He is able to renounce what his senses eagerly desire, and he is able to do what his whole material being protests against. This splendid privilege is the true charter of man. Therefore we honor especially those who practice this, because from this issue humanity's most beautiful virtues: unselfishness, loyal friendship, self-sacrificing love toward one's fellow man and one's country. As long as these virtues flourish on earth we shall always have decisive proof that the soul is not matter, but more than matter, different from matter: spirit. If the soul were matter, if matter constituted the essence of the soul, then all this would be impossible: the soul could not act in opposition to its own nature.

We feel: the soul in us is one thing, and the body another. Or are they not different? From where, then, comes my self-reproach if I have done wrong? Is it not from the soul? Whence comes a feeling of sadness even when I have satisfied all my material needs and my body is suffering no ailment? Is it not from the soul?

2) "Man has no soul, only brain." But then I should have to believe an impossibility, namely, that all general abstract ideas and all the moral decisions that I make in opposition to



matter, are of material origin. Then I must believe that the prodigious will power of a Caesar, a Charlemagne, a Napoleon, the genius of a Michelangelo, a Raphael, a Leonardo da Vinci, the world-encompassing spiritual strength of an Aristotle and of a St. Thomas, the self-immolating love for humanity of a St. Francis of Assisi and of a St. Elizabeth—that all this is nothing but the vibration of material atoms. I must believe that the soldier's dauntless love of country, that the self-sacrificing vigil of a mother beside her child's sick-bed, that all holy enthusiasm and performance of duty is nothing but the dance of corporeal molecules, their mingling and electrical vibration.

3) "Man has no soul, only brain." Then what evolves the marvelous strength that enables a dying person to keep himself alive sometimes for hours, or even for days? Who has not heard of cases which are clear signs that the soul kept life in the body that had already begun to die. I read of a mother whose death was imminent, but she did not want to die until her two sons had arrived, the one from the distant North, the other from the South. They arrived, and ten minutes later her heart ceased to beat. Who can explain this if man has no soul?

4) "Man has no soul, only brain." Then who can explain the not uncommon phenomenon, that persons who have been out of their minds for many years, regain their sanity shortly before death? This is a well-known fact in medical science. It is perhaps sufficient if I mention one famous case, the mother of Emperor Charles V, "mad" Johanna, whose brain was clouded for forty-nine years; on the day of her death, April 5, 1555, she entirely recovered her senses and died with a prayer on her lips. To recover one's senses just when the brain is steadily becoming weaker, is possible only if the brain is not all, but the soul, and this soul at the moment of death

frees itself from the fetters of matter and in its functioning has no more need of matter.

This is explicable only if we believe that all these phenomena are the first signs of life of the soul preparing to leave the chrysalis of the body, and first movement in the egg of the little bird preparing for flight, which must first break the shell of the egg that it may achieve this new form of life.

There is an empiric truth in the words of Victor Hugo: "You say that the soul is only the expression of bodily forces. But then how comes it that my soul becomes more radiant as my bodily forces prepare to leave me?" Truly, who could understand what so frequently happens, that the bodily life and bodily force of the dying often give evidence in the final moments of surprising, perhaps till then unknown, spiritual abilities?

If Socrates could say that the beginning of philosophy is to know that we know nothing, then today we could add that the conclusion of philosophy is to know that we must believe.

My dear brethren. Today's sermon was intended in the first place for those who do not believe in eternal life. But is it not an interesting fact that not even such persons can free themselves from the thought of life beyond the grave? Nor can those who would gladly do so. Nor even those who say that they do not concern themselves with this question.

Because this is a question that cannot leave anyone unconcerned. It is a question that springs from the innermost depths of the soul: What becomes of us after death? Is everything annihilated or does something of us remain? Is death the end of life, or the beginning of a new life?

How right Plato is when he makes the dying Socrates say to those around him: "It is truly worthy of man's remembrance. If the soul is immortal then we must provide not only

for the span of this earthly life, but for all time, and only then does the danger of neglecting the soul appear in all its dreadfulness. If in any case death meant parting from everything, then to die would be gain to the wicked man because by doing so he would be parted from his body, his soul, and also from his wickedness. However, as the soul appears to be immortal, there is for him no other escape from evil, than the endeavor to be as good and as sensible as possible. For the soul takes no other property with it to the next world than the self-discipline it has expended upon itself, with which it nourished itself and of which we assert that immediately upon the arrival of the deceased it will be of the greatest advantage or harm to him." What noble words from the lips of a genius who did not know the light of Christ! Amen.

### III

## THE TEACHING OF RELIGION ABOUT LIFE EVERLASTING

CHRISTIANITY has a joyful, triumphant word that often recurs in the liturgy. This word is "Alleluia." Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Rejoice!

Whence comes this triumphant fervor? From the fact that Christianity is the religion of victory. In Christianity love has overcome hate, belief unbelief, the Son of God sin, and, what perhaps gives us most cause for rejoicing, life has overcome death. Alleluia! Rejoice, for life has overcome death!

We all die. No difference of opinion exists about that. But what comes afterward? This is the starting-point of discussion. That the great Swiss artist, Böcklin, painted his picture "The Isle of the Dead" from the uttermost depths of human sorrow, is acknowledged by everyone. But somehow we feel that in spite of all its artistic value the picture is incomplete, something is lacking.

We acknowledge that this picture makes one shudder. A steep rock rises defiantly out of the sea, like inevitable fate. A few cypresses stand dolefully upon it. In the wall of the rock yawn the mouths of caves: the dwelling-places of death. Black clouds lower in the heavens. The waves murmur as if in unceasing lament. A small boat is just arriving at the shore; it brings a coffin; a white-shrouded figure bends reverently over the coffin. And the black mouths of the yawning chasms

seem to say: Today this one has come to us. Tomorrow will come another. And some day you will come. Quite surely you will also come.

Truly a startling picture, an artistic painting, yet in some way deficient. Something is lacking in it. What is there behind the cave's mouth and what awaits us after death? This is lacking.

And here the immense superiority of Christianity is seen when it proclaims with triumphant certainty that behind the sad Isle of the Dead the ocean of life everlasting awaits us.

The thought of eternal life was not first given to the world by Christianity. With the infallible power of Jesus' words, Christianity strengthened and exalted to unconditional certainty the desire and longing and instinctive premonition that has always dwelt in man about the continuation of earthly life, about the new form of life that follows upon death.

In today's sermon let us consider what Christianity teaches about life everlasting. Let us see how our Lord proclaimed eternal life, and how the idea of God is surety for it.

## I

### THE TEACHING OF CHRIST

We turn the pages of the Gospel. Not one thought do we find reiterated so many times and in so many different ways as the doctrine of life everlasting, the belief in the world to come. From this thought Christ starts out, and to this He returns. One thought is the basis of His every teaching: Save thy soul. But why, if there is no hereafter?

A. Let us examine our Lord's teaching, let us see how many times and with what emphasis He repeats that this earthly

life is only a beginning, only a time of probation, only a preface, but the book itself comes in life everlasting.

1) How varied our Lord's words about this life everlasting!

"Be ye also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come" (Matt. 24: 4). "Watch ye therefore because you know not the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25: 13). But why should we be prepared and why should we watch if with death there is an end to everything?

"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting" (John 6: 27). "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever" (John 6: 52).

"Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it" (Matt. 7: 13, 14).

Here are the Savior's words emanating a profound love: "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3: 16).

Let us note how He prepares His Apostles for persecutions: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10: 28).

We know what He promised on the cross to the repentant thief: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43).

And let us hear His great promise to each of us: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day" (John 6: 55).

How many listen uncomprehendingly to these words! I will raise him up. The dead will live? Is this possible? Is it not an audacious exaggeration? How many shrug their shoul-

ders unbelievably! How many laugh at Christ for saying them!

Laugh at Him? During His lifetime they once laughed at Him. When He bent over Jairus' dead daughter, saying to the mourners who were rending their clothes and weeping in impotent despair: "Why make you this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn" (Mark 5: 41), and she arose and walked.

See how often and in how many ways Christ taught that there is a continuation of earthly life, there is life everlasting.

2) The same thing is taught by His parables, one more beautiful than the other, and by His similitudes.

The laborers wished to uproot the cockle that grew among the wheat, but the goodman said they should leave it until the harvest, then reap it and burn it (Matt. 13: 30).

The fishermen sorted the fish in their nets and threw away the worthless ones. "So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall go out and shall separate the wicked from among the just" (Matt. 13: 49).

On another occasion a rich man speaks to his steward thus: "Give an account of thy stewardship" (Luke 16: 12).

The bridegroom says to the five foolish virgins: "I know you not" (Matt. 25: 12).

Christ says to His faithful servant: "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25: 21).

If we sum up all this, we can truly say that our Lord's whole mission, His entire life, His suffering, and His death are built upon the belief in life eternal. Therefore He so often and so decisively contrasts between earthly life and the life of the world to come. Therefore He emphasizes that the latter is the real, the true, the strong, and beautiful life. Every word

that He uttered, every one of His acts, every commandment that He gave, every prohibition that He made, all presume life in the hereafter.

B. It was from our Lord's teachings that St. Paul was able to describe the resurrection so magnificently.

1) He says: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (I Cor. 15: 52-55.)

The dead sleep in the earth, as the earth itself sleeps in winter; but they both await the spring.

The dead are motionless in the coffin, just as the chrysalis is motionless in the cocoon, but they await the colorful life of the butterfly.

The dead molder in the grave just as the seed molds in the earth: but both await the renewal of life in spring.

2) We shall also arise, just as Christ arose from death. Christ's soul again united with His body. But what became of that tormented, slain body? The body glorified in resurrection is no longer subject to the laws of matter. It passes through the window like a sunbeam and does not break it. It appears in a room, without the door opening to admit it. It comes and goes among us, the Apostles see it now in one place, then in another. It ascends into the heavens and has no need of elevating forces. Then I shall be like that after my resurrection. Glistening and beautiful and radiant and subject no longer to pain, knowing no limitations of space and time. But that my soul may once gain such a final and perfect



triumph over my body, I must do everything now in earthly life to insure a glorious resurrection.

Do we rise again? Yes. We shall all rise, but not all of us shall rise to life everlasting. Only those rise again to life eternal who, properly speaking, never ceased to live. This is so in all nature. In spring the grass grows again because its roots in the earth were living even in winter's great graveyard. The leaf of a tree shoots forth anew because it lived in the bud. And that man grows and rises again whose soul lived a life of faith and morality. Those who live in sin, who have died in their lifetime, how shall they live after death?

Yes, this is the Christian conception of life everlasting that we gain from our Lord's teaching.

## II

### THE IDEA OF GOD

If, however, we reflect upon the idea of God in our Christian faith, besides our Lord's clear doctrine we find many other arguments that prove the reality of life hereafter. If God exists, there must also be life hereafter, for such a life is demanded by God's sublimity, His goodness, and His justice.

A. Life continuing after death is demanded by God's sublimity.

1) Only life hereafter and the judgment rendered then will justify God in everything. Here on earth sinners are so audacious, they tread God's laws underfoot with such provocative daring, that the good and the honorable often cry out: "Lord, canst Thou overlook even this? Wilt Thou not punish this either?" Then there must be another life where the sublimity of the offended God receives satisfaction and

where everyone will discover that no one rebels against God with impunity.

2) The wisdom of divine Providence ordering everything for the best, will here be seen. In the confused and painful happenings of this earthly life we have difficulty in perceiving the guiding finger of Providence. Many rebel against God's plans and commands because in world events they see such terrible confusion, just as when one looks at the reverse side of a large Persian rug. So there must be another life, another place, where we see not the reverse side of history's gigantic carpet as has been the case in this earthly life, but its surface. With humble homage we shall then perceive the sublime plans of divine Providence that orders all things for the best and always for our good.

Either there is no sublime God or there is a life everlasting.

B. Life beyond the grave is likewise demanded by God's goodness. There is no life hereafter? Then God is not our benign Father. Could He have created man only to make him miserable?

1) How much man suffers! More than any other living thing in the world. Man knows his sorrow beforehand, he expects it and thus increases it. Then he bemoans it and tears open his wound. Other creatures die, but they know nothing of it beforehand; man knows beforehand and shudders at it. And what is still more dreadful, we have spiritual sufferings: anxiety, grief, when others whom we love have to suffer or die and we are unable to help them.

Man suffers; yet he was not created for suffering, but for happiness. He seeks happiness and longs for it, but in vain: the happiness that he finds in life makes him only more eager. He seeks beauty, but sees that destruction overtakes it; he seeks wealth, well-being, honor, glory: all in vain.

2) If, therefore, I believe in God, I must also believe in life

everlasting. Because God has implanted in me the desire that cannot be gratified here, and that continually cries within me: "To live. To live. And not to die." How the longing for perfect happiness burns within us! And no one finds it in this life. How we strive for perfect light of sight! And no one finds it in this life. We long for peace; and there is no peace. For rest; and there is no rest. For answers to so many questions; and there is no answer. For truth; and there is no truth. How many plans we make; and nothing comes of them. How many things we hope for; and none of our hopes are realized.

My Lord, is it for this Thou hast created man? That he should eat out his heart? Whatever other creature I consider, I see that its desires and the means of attaining them are in proportion the one to the other. An animal satisfies its hunger and is content. But I? I thirst, and earth has no draught that can satisfy my thirst. I need life, I need perfect Beauty, absolute Truth, undisturbed Happiness. And if no such things are attainable? No undisturbed happiness, no life everlasting? Then why hast Thou implanted these desires in me? If truly I was born only to die, then why do I shudder at the thought of dying? Lord, if I may never see Thee, why hast Thou allowed me to know Thee? Why hast Thou created such a void in my heart, that nothing in the world can fill it except Thou thyself, great God?

But I believe that God has not planted deceptive longings in my soul. I believe that, although through thorny paths of suffering, He leads me to eternal life, for God is infinitely good. Either there is no good God, or there is life everlasting.

C. Life hereafter is demanded by God's justice. This belief gives moral world-order its value.

1) How interesting it is to travel on one of the great express trains crossing the continent! What a variety of passengers is

to be seen! A stout merchant is in one of the seats, a thick gold watch-chain adorning his vest; he has a fragrant cigar in his mouth, in his hands is a notorious illustrated paper, and he laughs boisterously as he looks at the pictures. Beside him a priest softly murmurs his breviary: "Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto." A third passenger, a society woman traveling to a pleasure resort, lays aside her novel every half-hour, takes out her mirror and rouges and powders her face. Opposite to her sits a pretty young mother with her two children; she is full of gentleness, full of love. And the train rushes on, rushes on without stopping.

These all arrive at their destination. But those with whom the train of life is rushing on, we human beings squeezed side by side on earth, I wonder if we all reach the same goal. Do we come to the moldering grave, however we have lived on this earth? Then God would not be just. If with death everything is at an end, where do those receive their reward who here on earth endured in honor and in virtue at the price of immense sacrifice? If with death everything is at an end, where do those receive their punishment whom in earthly life the world knew as good and respectable, who were praised and exalted, but in reality their whole lives were full of secret sin and wickedness?

2) O yes. There must be another life where every sin receives its punishment. Here on earth sin often triumphs and gains the victory. But from the lips of embittered and aggrieved individuals we hear this consolation: "Every sin avenges itself. Only wait. A just God will repay."

Is it not this belief that consoles us for all the injustice we have to suffer?

"A just God will repay." Long ago we often heard this said, but perhaps there was never so much to be paid for on earth as today. At other times honesty and sin also strove

together; but immorality never flaunted itself with such cynical arrogance, and honesty never vegetated so sadly as in many manifestations of present-day life.

“A just God will some day repay everything.” But where will He repay if there is no continuation to earthly life? If the grave envelops the innocent and the sinner, the Godfearing and the blasphemer, the murderer and his victim in the same way, if the grave is the end of everything, what then? Can we bear this thought? Must this life not be followed by another, where every sin receives its punishment?

3) And must not God provide another life, where every virtue receives its due reward? Here on earth the world judges unjustly; often the good are humbled and the honest oppressed. They find deep consolation in the thought of God’s future realm, where everything will be measured by a very different standard.

How many worthy, respectable men are justified in saying of their earthly lives: I never succeed in anything here. If I start out upon a journey, I am certain to take the wrong turn. If I take part in a game, I am certain to lose. My friends are certain to deceive me. My enemies are certain to attack me. My wine is certain to be watered. My joy is certain to be turned to gall. And were I to dip my pen in my fate, with what black ink I should be able to write!

How many could say that!

How greatly, therefore, God’s justice requires that there should be another world where God, as the Savior says, “will render to every man according to his works”! (Matt. 16: 27.)

Truly, either there is no just God or there is life everlasting.

As my conscience within me and my consciousness of being and every star in the heavens and every flower in the meadows proclaim that God is, so God’s wisdom, goodness, and justice proclaim that I have an immortal soul and life

everlasting is. Belief in God and belief in life eternal belong inseparably together.

My dear brethren. In the Campo Santo at Genoa this sublime epitaph of three words can be deciphered on an ancient tombstone: *Occido cum sole* ("I set like the sun"). What a comforting thought: Do not weep hopelessly at my death. Who mourns the setting sun at eventide? We know that next day it will rise again in the splendor of dawn. And I, too, have only gone to the grave in this way. I have gone to rest like the sun, and like the sun I shall rise again.

Now we understand what is lacking in Böcklin's famous picture, "The Isle of the Dead." We understand why this picture has a disturbing, depressing effect upon the beholder, in spite of its artistic value. It is because the drooping branches of the mournful cypresses on it are not raised aloft by consoling faith. Because the lowering black clouds are not irradiated by the rays of life everlasting. Because the yawning mouths of the caverns irretrievably swallow the dead, and the words of Christ's promise do not glow above them.

What words? Those which Christ said for the first time at Lazarus' grave to console Martha mourning for her brother, but which since then resound through the world as a divine solace that strengthens our souls mourning our dear dead or trembling at the thought of our own death. "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" (John 11: 25, 26).

*Occido cum sole.* I go to rest like the sun, and like the sun I too shall rise again.

This I believe, this is my sacred conviction, this is my consolation, this is my guide in life. God grant that this may be the reward that I attain. Amen.

## IV

### REASONABLENESS OF BELIEF IN LIFE EVERLASTING

THERE is no European country so rich in natural beauty as Switzerland, the land that abounds in mountains, forests, glaciers, brooks. Among these natural beauties a prominent place is taken by the Tamina Gorge, the source and bed of the Tamina River. One can go right up to the source, deep in the interior of an immense mountain. Who could say for how many thousands of years this warm water thundered in the depths of the mountain until it hollowed out that gigantic path for itself? There the little rivulet dashes against the subterranean rocks and some irresistible power draws it downward, out of the mountain. At the opening in the mountainside a spa has been erected, Bad Pfäfers. Rheumatic invalids who can hardly move begin to walk again there. And when the water has forced its way through this, it at last reaches the open, the warm sunshine, and, as if reborn, continues its way toward its mouth, toward the river Rhine.

So it is with human life. Through long decades we live here on earth; we dash and bruise ourselves against its stones and rocks and hollow a path for ourselves through the mountain. Some irresistible power draws us constantly nearer to the opening, where death's mysterious spa awaits us. Here we cast off all earthly heaviness, lay aside material life's every support, and soar with fresh impulse in the sunshine of eternal light on the pinions of eternity toward the eternal God.

The German language expresses this clearly when it says that death is not an *Untergang* but an *Ubergang*, not destruction but a crossing over; it is not more than when, going from one room into another, we step across the threshold. Death is the crossing of a threshold.

This belief, the belief in a future life, has always been the common property of mankind. It is plainly proclaimed by our blessed Lord, as well as by the idea of God. To establish this truth by sheer logical reasoning is the task that awaits us in today's sermon.

Today we shall examine those arguments that prove to the philosophical man what the races always believed and what Christianity plainly teaches: there is an immortal soul, there is life everlasting.

The arguments may be divided into three groups: That there is a life hereafter, an immortal soul, is proved by man's mind, by his will, and by his heart.

## I

### THE TESTIMONY OF REASON

A. Our lives have an object only if there is life everlasting.

1) Everything in the world has some object. That is why a little child asks continually: Why? Why is this so, papa? Why is this so, mamma? But do not tell him that it is for no reason. Because then he will ask: "But if it is for no reason, then why is it at all?"

St. Francis of Assisi once asked a stone-mason:

"What are you doing, brother?"

The man replied: "I am working all day."

"And why are you working?"

"In order to earn money."

"And what do you need money for?"



"That I may have bread."

"And why do you want to have bread?"

"Ha! that is interesting. That I may live."

"And why do you live?"

Yes, this is the great question, the final question: Why do I live? What is the object of my life? Everything in the world has an object. Could only man have none? In me every muscle, nerve, vein, sinew, molecule has its important object. Could only the whole have none? So I must have some object, must I not? Then what is my object?

2) If there is no world to come, my object is evidently here on earth. But what is this object? What is the purpose of my life?

Perhaps to gain wealth? Now is that a worthy object for a clever man? Why, however much I earned, I must leave everything to my heirs, "the laughing heirs," as one often hears them called. And can everyone be wealthy? No indeed. Then why have those lived who could not become rich? Those who have attained their object are at peace; but have those who are wealthy no more desires? Ah, nonsense. They are never at peace. Certainly wealth cannot be the purpose of life.

Then perhaps it is pleasure and enjoyment? No, it cannot be these, because then the greater number of men would never attain their object, so little enjoyment and pleasure is vouchsafed them. And the nearer a being comes to his object the more perfect does he become; but does man become more perfect the more pleasures he enjoys? On the contrary: he becomes so much the more dissatisfied, ill-humored, dispirited.

Then what is man's object? Perhaps to acquire honor and a great name for himself?

O yes, this would be a finer thought than the preceding ones, but it is still not sufficient. How would all those nameless

millions attain their object, who, unknown and unsung, quietly do their duty all their lives?

But then what is the object of life? To struggle for sixty, seventy, eighty years and then to disappear, leaving no trace? Can man's reason accept and submit to this? I cast a stone into the water: rings are formed, then everything becomes calm and the water is smooth again. If the stone is a large one, the ripples last for a longer time, but then it also becomes smooth. Can you bear the thought that human life is nothing more than this?

When man, thus tormented, seeks the purpose of life, but finds it nowhere on earth, he raises his eyes beyond earthly things and at once everything becomes clear to him. It is natural that I do not find my purpose on earth. Why? Because God did not create me for this world. This earthly life is but a preface to the book of eternity. In death the body disintegrates, the outer covering falls off; and the undying, eternally living soul remains.

B. But is this possible? Is it possible that we live even after the death of the body?

Christianity's great philosopher and scholar, St. Augustine, relates a Carthaginian doctor's remarkable dream. Genadius—this was the doctor's name—had doubts as to how man could continue to live after the death of the body. In a dream, a radiant youth appeared to him and said:

"Genadius, are you now asleep or awake?"

"I am asleep," replied the doctor.

"Do you see me?" inquired the youth.

"Yes, I see you."

"With what do you see? With your bodily eyes?"

"No, not with them, they are closed. I do not know with what I see you."

But the youth continued to question him: "Genadius, do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"With what do you hear? With your ears?"

"No, not with them. I do not know with what I hear."

And again the youth asked. "Genadius, are you now speaking to me?"

"Yes, I am."

"With what do you speak? With your lips?"

"No, not with them, I do not know with what I speak."

"Now you see," said the angel, "your senses are at rest, yet you see, hear, and speak. And when the hour comes that your senses will rest forever, that is, when you die, then too you will continue to see, to hear, to speak, and to feel."

C. Continuing this thought, we perceive that a new form of life awaits not only our souls in the hereafter, but that not even our bodies are finally destroyed; they too will rise again. The body dies, it is true, but it does not remain dust forever.

1) Were it to remain dust, then the Almighty's most beautiful thought would remain incomplete. Is the human body not worthy to be raised from death by the Creator? Among all created material things, the human body is the Creator's most beautiful work. The May sunshine is glorious; but can it be so radiant as the tender smile of a human being? Dawn in spring is beautiful; but is not the angelic glance of a pure-souled youth more beautiful? The starry sky enchants us; but what is it compared to the clear eyes of a child? Birds trill delightfully; but what is that compared to the voice of man? How beautiful man must have been when he left his Maker's hands and still radiated his likeness to God, how beautiful he must have been, if even now, defiled by sin, he so greatly surpasses everything around him!

2) Now tell me: is it credible that God allows this work of His to be annihilated for all time? The stars have been shining for thousands of years, and their brilliance has not expired. How many thousand springtimes the earth has already seen, and its fertility is not exhausted. Wells bubble, valleys blossom, mountains tower aloft, everything lives on. Can only man's fate be a few brief years and then the grave, silence, and a crumbling to dust?

Should even man's own works outlive him? Here around us stand the old houses of this city. They were built, some of them, a hundred years ago, and still stand. But where are their builders? In our public squares we see statues that were made decades ago. They stand, and those who carved them died long ago. But are those sculptors annihilated? A man paints his own portrait. Does this copy live longer than the original, who was created by almighty God Himself? No. I cannot believe this.

3) Rather do I think, if I may use a comparison, that as the insect creeping in the dust winds itself into its cocoon, enclosing itself in a motionless tomb, afterward to emerge with new strength in a beautiful new body, and the gaudy butterfly then no longer descends to the dust, but alights only on flowers, so the heavy, awkward, sick body made of dust first descends to the grave, but afterward loses all heaviness, and when it rises it is noble, spiritual, it can no longer suffer, and it is more radiant than the stars of heaven.

Yes, there is a great difference between the man moldering in the grave and the man who lives eternally. But is there not a great difference between the chrysalis lying motionless in its cocoon and the gaily colored butterfly? Yet the butterfly was once a motionless chrysalis.

"There will be no resurrection because we cannot understand how the next life would be," say doubters. But do you

understand how this first life came to be? Who understands this? And if God was able to give life that had not been, can He not give back that which had once already been?

Truly, the reality of life everlasting is proved by man's reasoning mind. But it is also proved by man's will.

## II

### THE TESTIMONY OF MAN'S WILL

A. With an elemental urge we long for justice. This is so deeply rooted in our natures that even a four-year-old child becomes sad, without knowing why, when it hears of the unjust suffering that Cinderella had to endure from her wicked stepmother.

1) But where is justice to be found on this earth? On all sides we see honor trampled upon and evil triumphant. Yet we cannot bear the thought that evil triumphs over good. Earthly life is filled with discord, but we feel that somewhere things will be equalized. No dramatist would venture to end his play with the triumph of evil. The spectators would say, and rightly: "The play is not finished." In modern music there is dissonance, but at last every dissonance must dissolve into harmony.

2) But life must not end with the triumph of sin. Can deception triumph? Can wickedness triumph? Can evil triumph? Can he who tramples God's laws underfoot triumph? Yet if there is no hereafter, the wicked triumph. If there is no hereafter, then however people have spent their lives, their fate is the same: to molder in the grave. But who can bear this thought?

A sister of mercy is dying. Her whole life has been an unceasing sacrifice of love toward her fellow men. Now she is dying of the typhoid fever contracted while nursing typhoid

patients. And an old voluptuary is dying too, who has wallowed in sin all his life and is now dying impenitent after the most dreadful dissipation. Can the same fate await both of them? Can anyone in sober sense bear this thought?

B. The longing for eternal life is so deeply rooted in men's souls that not even the foes of Christianity can free themselves from it. History abounds with examples of how the defiant voice of the atheists is stilled in moments of mortal danger.

When cholera raged in France in the year 1835, even the so-called "enlightened" freethinkers walked barefoot in the streets of Paris with lighted candles in their hands, beating their breasts and praying: *Parce, Domine!* ("Have mercy, Lord!").

And did not the monster of the French Revolution, Camille Desmoulins, write to his wife before being led to execution: "Not concerned with my torments, I believe that God exists. Lucille, we shall meet again."

### III

#### THE TESTIMONY OF MAN'S HEART

What we conclude from the functions of mind and will by mere human reasoning—life everlasting beyond the grave—must also be inferred from the different manifestations of the human heart.

A. The human heart yearns with elemental force for happiness. We are thus created: we long to be happy. Do you not hear the unceasing cry of millions for happiness? Do you not see the restless striving of millions to attain happiness?

1) But where on this earth is happiness? Where can you find complete, imperishable, undisturbed happiness? Man seeks happiness, turning night into day with self-sacrificing work, as the ancients sought "the philosopher's stone"; and

man does not succeed in finding it, just as they did not succeed.

We need complete happiness. Give every earthly treasure to man; for a day he is happy, but then he asks: "Is that all?" Even Alexander the Great, at the very zenith of his triumphs, began to weep as he said: "There are still the stars. Those I cannot add to my conquests."

And we need imperishable happiness. The happier man is, the more dreadful is the thought: This is transient, everything is transient.

2) If there is no hereafter, God is but playing with us. He has planted a desire in us, the desire for happiness, which we can never attain. Why has God given us this consuming longing for perfect justice, for imperishable happiness, if this longing is never to be gratified?

If the natives of mountainous districts come to the plains, they feel a homesickness for the snowy heights where they were born. Thus, too, our souls respond to all that is beautiful, good, and true, because their true home is another realm where perfect Beauty, Goodness, and Truth are enthroned.

3) "With death everything is at an end. Life is at an end, all happiness is at an end." These words are easily said. But try to believe it when you stand at the deathbed of your beloved wife or your precious child. Try to believe it at the funeral of your mother.

Maternal love. There is no word on earth that rings more warmly, no more trustworthy, blessed loyalty. Never, never could I believe that when her dear earthly remains were lowered into the grave, I lost my mother forever. Lost the love with which she nursed me in my infancy, which accompanied me when I became a grown man? Lost forever? No. This I will never believe.

B. But man longs not only for happiness, but also for jus-

tice. Since the first man gazed up questioningly, searchingly at the stars, an unappeasable thirst for truth beset the human race.

1) But how much truth do we find on this earth? What tiny grains of it! What fragments of it! What is it then in us that thirsts so longingly for complete truth? Where shall we find this, if not in that realm which Newman refers to in his epitaph: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* ("From shadows and symbols he passed to the realm of truth").

Man always feels his imperfection, always seeks something better, something greater. We are travelers; somewhere a destination awaits us.

Man seeks life. But we possess life. Ah, nonsense! What we possess here on earth is only a tiny crumb of life, only a shadow of life. A bud not yet unfolded. A drop of nectar for whose source we yearn.

2) Human life here on earth is never consummated, we never finish with ourselves. Therefore there must be another life, a life of consummation, of perfection. How affecting is the confession of that genius, Michelangelo who, after ninety years spent in creating the most beautiful works of art, said two days before his death: "I regret only two things: that I did not care more for the salvation of my soul and that I must die just when I am beginning to stammer the first words of my art."

Or there are Victor Hugo's words: "I draw nearer and nearer to my end and hear around me ever more clearly the deathless symphony of the worlds that call to me. It is such a wonderful and simple thing! For half a century I have written down my thoughts in prose and poem. I have tried everything, but I feel that I have not said a thousandth part of what lives within me."



You know perhaps the legend of the mother whose son was deaf and dumb. The boy died without having been able even once to speak his mother's name. The woman lived for many long years, silently bearing the grief in her aching heart. She became old and died. And see, at the gates of heaven her son met her with the joyful cry of: "Mother! My own dear Mother!"

Always, with instinctive certainty, mankind has felt that there must be a place where our noblest desires are realized, the desires that dwell within us but are never realized here on earth.

3) But is this eternal longing within us only vain imagining? Does this instinctive feeling of ours delude us?

With the first cold autumn wind, the swallows become restless. An irresistible instinct drives them toward the south where they find warm nests and a certainty of food, when here with us the chill of winter covers the earth and the insects hide away. The little swallow hatched here this season, which has never yet seen a winter, goes too. The swallow hatched in a cage that has never had to seek its food, becomes restless and, if we free it, it goes away too. Whither do they fly? Far away, to a southern world, that they have never seen, that they have never heard of. What takes them? Natural science says they are impelled by instinct.

Well and good. Nature has given them this instinct. And if they were deceived? If no warmth awaited them down south, but icy cold and death? Would this instinct have any meaning? No. Nature would have deceived them. But nature is not in the habit of deceiving her creatures. If the swallow could think, it would say: "It is quite certain that there is another world, for my instinct says there is."

The swallow cannot think. However, I can and I say:

“There must be a hereafter, because my reason, my will, and my heart all say that this life has a continuation, a consummation; there is life everlasting.”

My dear brethren. Deep thinkers feel as though they were walking in shadow here on earth: everything is only a beginning, everything is half-accomplished work, always some dissatisfaction drives them. They feel that there should be a place where the sunshine is perfect and where the song that we sing will be perfect, as in the story of the violinist.

There once lived a violinist who determined to learn to play the most beautiful melody to be found on earth. He often went to the forest to hear the song of birds. Then of a sudden he was able to play so charmingly that people thought they heard the lark and the nightingale singing. It was beautiful, but for our violinist it was not beautiful enough.

So he sought the soft zephyr and listened to its tender melody. He stood in the raging storm and listened to its wild roaring. And he learned this too. His violin sang like a softly murmuring breeze among the leaves, then thundered like the storm that bends great oaks at its will. It was sublime: but for our violinist it was not yet beautiful enough.

Then he observed the waters and with his violin he imitated the frenzy of mountain torrents, the thundering of the surf, the rippling murmur of some purling little brook. It was beautiful; but our violinist was still dissatisfied.

Then he went among men. He played all the joyous songs of youth, lively dances, and mournful melodies; he played religious tunes too. Now and again his heart beat quicker at an air welling up from the depths of the human soul. But the most beautiful song, the song that he had restlessly longed for all his life, he still could not find.

Meanwhile he had become gray, old, and sick unto death. As he lay awaiting his last hour, see, suddenly from a great

distance wonderful music fell upon his ear. That is it! That is the song he sought all his life: the most beautiful, the most sublime song. Gathering together the last remnants of his strength, he seizes his violin, his hand shakes, his fingers tremble, yet he plays the song, the most beautiful song sought for and presaged all his life. And as he ended the last note of the song, all four strings of his violin snapped, and he fell back on his pillows—dead.

He found the most beautiful song in God's eternal kingdom. Amen.

## V

### THE FRUIT OF BELIEF IN LIFE EVERLASTING

IN grape-growing districts a strange thing is spoken of by the vinedressers. They say that in spring, when the force of new life rises in the branches and the vines begin to sprout, the wine in the depths of the cellars becomes disturbed, fermenting and seething in the casks as if some mysterious connection existed between it and the vine from which it came; it is as though the wine rejoiced that new life is sprouting in the vine on which its grapes once grew.

Perhaps the whole thing is only imagination. No imagination, however, but sacred fact is the truth that, as often as our souls turn in thought to the eternal home where they will some day return, a restless holy joy fills us. We feel the urge and encouragement that earthly life receives from the thought of life everlasting.

Of course I am thinking of those who are consistent to their principles, whose whole manner of life shows that they believe in eternal life. Because, regrettably enough, some who accept this theoretically and even avow belief in life everlasting, do not accept it in their hearts. We see just as little of it in their lives as in the lives of those who are altogether unbelieving.

We sometimes say that a certain matter "must be taken to heart." By this expression we mean not only that a truth must be believed and understood by the mind, but that it must also be accepted in the heart, that is, we must accept it so that it

permeates our entire being and directs our thoughts, our feelings, and our wills. Today I wish to bring the truth of life everlasting to your hearts and point out that belief in life everlasting gives an impulse to life, strength in temptation, and courage in suffering.

## I

## SPIRITUAL POWER

The earthly existence of a person who does not believe in life everlasting may be compared to a bridge that has collapsed part way across the river and does not reach the opposite bank. On the other hand, a believer gains wings with this belief, wings that enable him to rise to heights unattainable by unbelievers. A certain sociologist says that belief in the immortality of the soul is "the greatest cultural factor in all history" because this belief gives a purpose to man's life and thus completely transforms his life.

A. Christianity's importance and value, its sublime impulse, its splendid activity, spring from the belief in life everlasting. This is the goal that we must attain.

1) Those who do not live the religious life of an earnest believer have no idea what a source of spiritual endeavor is derived from belief in life everlasting. Believers fervently pray for this and strive for it. With this end in view, they practice much self-denial and perform many good deeds.

This is the reason for the sacraments and various devotional practices, for sacrifice and renunciation, fasting and self-discipline, churches, reason for the unceasing conflict with our sinful natures. This is the reason for the serious acceptance of our Lord's words: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able" (Luke 13: 24).

2) We sometimes hear the reproach that Christianity lowers the value of earthly life because it always speaks of the life hereafter, of the world to come. The very opposite is true: belief in life everlasting increases the value of earthly life.

Since eternal life depends wholly on a well spent earthly life, the value of earthly life grows to gigantic proportions. From belief in life eternal springs our love of work. This is apparently a contradiction. Yet the wearing, monotonous work of everyday life, upon which all human culture has been erected and on which it depends, can be accomplished only by a humanity on whom its belief has impressed a sense of duty, a feeling that, by fidelity to the tasks of earthly life, life everlasting is to be gained.

3) Again, only belief in life everlasting keeps the instinctive desire for earthly work and earthly wealth within rightful bounds. Whoever does not believe in the continuation of earthly life naturally scrapes together money and treasures with all his ten fingers, not allowing another to enjoy anything of his possessions, trampling upon everyone in this pursuit of greed. Whereas he in whom belief in life everlasting is a guiding principle regards earthly life as something transient and does not concentrate all his desires and labors on such fleeting things.

Whatever the world gives to such a man, it is not enough for him. He wants eternal happiness, eternal life. His ideal is St. Philip Neri who, when told that the pope intended to make him a cardinal, threw his hat into the air and cried out: "Paradise is what I want, not the purple."

For such a man, the sort of "eternal" life proclaimed by unbelief is not sufficient: "Your atoms will circulate eternally in the cosmic void because nothing is ever lost"; "your thoughts continue to work"; "you will be honored by a splen-

did statue." This is not sufficient for me. If I am dead, do not write my biography in dead letters, on dead paper; do not carve any statue of me that a facsimile of my figure may stand in dead stone or cold bronze silently and blindly by the wayside. I need life after death, real life, life everlasting. He who created me for earthly life, shall now give me new life, but more beautiful, happier, life that never ends. This is the stupendous goal before which belief in life everlasting places me.

B. In placing this exalted end before us, Christianity transforms our whole earthly life.

1) On one occasion the Greek philosopher Zeno asked the oracle what he must do to live a virtuous life. The answer was merely these few words: "Ask the dead."

Those who are accustomed to ask the dead—which in Christian language means that they are in the habit of thinking of the next life—will view earthly life and all its happenings in quite another light. *Sub specie aeternitatis* ("from the viewpoint of eternity"); they will weigh everything against the thought of eternal life, their every project, thought, desire, will be imbued with the breath of eternity, ennobling and refining them.

In life they will strive to keep God's laws and the laws of the Church, because they know that everything—attendance at mass, the use of the sacraments, prayer, fasting, self-discipline—all serve this eternal life.

They also work hard for a livelihood, for advancement in their earthly career, but in every endeavor the Lord's words are before them: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16: 26.)

They also try to secure a respectable livelihood. But in face

of temptation to acquire wealth by unjust means, they remember the Lord's words: "Thou fool. This night do they require thy soul of thee, and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12: 20.)

In a word, those who seriously consider life everlasting, who not only believe in it but also take it to heart, will judge earthly life from the standpoint of eternity and will live it accordingly. They will stand firmly on the earth, because they must live here; but their hearts will beat heavenward, their heads will be uplifted to the stars.

2) Some wonder whether life everlasting is worth so much toil, so much self-denial.

A thousand times more. For what is life everlasting? We use phrases whose meaning we never fully grasp. *Per omnia saecula saeculorum*, we pray. But no one can fully understand what this means. Here on earth we are enclosed in space, time, matter, but the next life has no space, no time, no matter, there time is not composed of minutes and hours. There is no past and future, only present. There is no yesterday and tomorrow, only today. There is no morning and evening, only noon. There the ocean has no shore, there a line has no end. That is, we cannot measure eternity with a line, but rather with a circle, because a line, however much prolonged, has an end somewhere, but a circle has no end anywhere, every part of it is both the beginning and the end.

Here the truth of St. Augustine's words becomes evident: "Ye poor, what do you lack if you possess God? Ye rich, what do you possess if you lack God?"

Here we understand Gardonyi's words: "If you possess God, you possess everything; but if you have no God, you do not possess anything and never will possess anything."



## II

BELIEF IN LIFE EVERLASTING GIVES STRENGTH IN  
TEMPTATION

Belief in life everlasting not only marks an exalted goal for earthly life; it is also strength against temptations that would keep us from our eternal goal.

A. Our Lord so often mentions the serious thought of life everlasting in order to make us capable of sacrifice.

1) *Sacrifice everything to gain life everlasting.* This is Christ's doctrine and exhortation. Yes, even if one of your hands or one of your eyes is lost in the struggle. Starvation and prison, suffering and martyrdom in this world do not count, if you gain the world to come. This voice cries from the cross: You fight a life and death struggle: here you must not fall.

That this life everlasting is no lottery prize that falls unexpectedly into our hands, but must be won by contending heroically all our lives, is a matter of course. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life; keep the commandment without spot" (I Tim. 6: 12, 14), writes St. Paul to Timothy.

2) Keep the commandment, for to be good is so beautiful and tranquillizing. Sometimes this reasoning is sufficient. But, alas, sometimes temptation assails us so mightily that nothing helps us to withstand it except the belief in life everlasting, the fear that we may spoil forever our lives hereafter.

A father was loudly disputing with some friends, saying that he did not believe in heaven and in hell. His wife, pointing to their little girl playing in a corner of the room, whispered:

"Do not talk like that before the child."

The father waved her aside: "She does not understand

what I am talking about." Then he turned to the child saying: "Do you understand what papa is saying?"

The child's eyes shone triumphantly as she said proudly: "Yes."

"Well, what did I say?"

"That nobody needs to be good."

How right the child was! What restrains, if anything at all restrains our youth from dissipation, from dishonorable deeds, except the thought of life everlasting? And those who sin and begin to slip downhill, what do they forsake first? Belief in life everlasting. What gives a person strength to perform his duty when others neglect theirs? What gives strength for the struggle to preserve our moral integrity in poverty, when by merely closing our eyes to one or two little things we might achieve success at once in this world? What gives strength for honest work when we might go farther with deception? Belief in life everlasting.

B. Life everlasting is a powerful warning in times of temptation.

1) When St. Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea, the Roman governor Felix brought the Apostle before him to question him. All the power of the Roman Empire was behind Felix. Before him stood the prisoner in chains, between armed soldiers. Yet Holy Writ notes that when St. Paul began to preach to him of justice and chastity and of the judgment to come, Felix was terrified (Acts 24: 25). Belief in a life beyond the grave, the thought of a reckoning to be made, may well terrify not only the Roman governor, but everyone else.

2) If only we were to think of this often! Especially when alluring temptations assail us.

A certain chief of police in Paris had an interesting method in his campaign against the noise made in the streets by intoxicated persons. He simply had a film made of them, and

showed it to them when they had become sober. The effect was amazing. In a sober state they were utterly ashamed of the foolish actions and coarse language they had used while intoxicated.

An immense film runs round the world, God's all-embracing knowledge. On this film appear our every word, every deed, every desire, every plan, every secret. Alas, what a disgrace it will be when this film is produced on judgment day, when by the glow of eternal light we shall see in our sober senses what we foolishly committed in the intoxication of earthly life!

3) I am sorry to say that people do not like to think of this. They are engrossed by earthly cares. On the day of judgment they will fare as a famous historian fared who was exploring the country of the Nile. While crossing the river, he began talking to the boatman.

"Are you acquainted with the Sanscrit language?" he asked.

"No, sir," answered the boatman.

"Can you recognize the stars?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anything of the history of this earth?"

"I do not, sir."

"Man!" cried the scholar; "you have lost half your life."

Suddenly a great storm of wind arose, and the boisterous waves upset the boat.

"Sir," shouted the boatman; "do you know how to swim?"

"I do not."

"Then you have lost your whole life, sir."

The boatman reached the shore with difficulty, but the scholar was drowned.

Many people are interested in various things here on earth, in many things, but not in life everlasting. Many superfluous things they acquire in their lives, but they do not see to it that

they know how to swim when the storm of the last judgment breaks.

### III

#### BELIEF IN LIFE EVERLASTING IS ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING

Belief in life everlasting gives us courage in suffering. However human life is perfected here on earth, suffering will always be the lot of man: calamities of nature, privation, illness, pain, and there will always be death.

If the grave is the last act in life, then life is a great tragedy. But what suffering, catastrophe, disaster, affliction I can bear if I believe in life everlasting!

A. "I believe in life everlasting." What a source of strength this belief is in the struggle of life! What endurance in suffering! Have you ever noticed the blind? Their faces are always turned upward. If this world is dark about me, the next world gives me light.

In time of suffering the greatest men have derived strength from their belief in life everlasting. Thus it was with those two luminaries of human genius, St. Augustine and Dante, when their souls were assailed by gnawing pangs of suffering. Do you know what strengthened these two stupendous intellects for battle? Flaming love for the eternal home, the fiery vision of life everlasting, the power of the thought of life hereafter that superseded every other thought and desire.

So it was with Sir Thomas More, the great English chancellor, when he refused to approve the divorce of Henry VIII and consequently was deprived of his high office and was sent to the Tower. Neither promise nor threat could shake him. Finally his wife and weeping children visited him in prison.

Throwing herself on her knees, his wife implored him:

“Think how long we could live happily together. Why will you die so young?”

“How long might we expect to live?” More asked.

“For twenty years at least,” replied his wife.

“Twenty years. For the sake of twenty years shall I give up my eternal life, my eternal happiness?”

And after seventeen months of imprisonment, he courageously laid his head upon the executioner’s block on July 6, 1535.

Belief in life everlasting gives courage in suffering.

B. But only if this belief is truly living in me. The inspired word says: “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth before the time of affliction come . . . and the dust return into its earth from whence it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it” (Eccles. 12: 1, 7).

St. Paul says: “We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come” (Heb. 13: 14). Brethren, do you believe this?

St. Paul underwent great and many sufferings. Yet he is almost beside himself with joy and can hardly find words in his enthusiasm when he thinks of the resurrection: “One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body” (I Cor. 15: 41-44).

Tell me, do you believe this? In the midst of suffering can you comfort yourself with such joyful certainty as St. Paul comforted himself with? “We faint not. . . . For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory”

(II Cor. 4: 16, 17). "For we know, if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven" (II Cor. 5: 1).

But tell me, brethren, do you believe this? Do you believe it, not only "perhaps," "eventually," "it may be," "it would be beautiful if it were so"? No. But do you believe it so that your whole life, your every plan and desire, are permeated and directed by this belief?

Newton, the renowned scientist, was once asked this question: "Man's body becomes dust. If the resurrection really takes place, who will collect the millions and millions of dispersed grains of dust to make a new body for the soul?" Newton did not reply. He seized a handful of iron filings, mixed them with sand and then asked: "Who will collect these dispersed filings again?" And when no one could answer him, he seized a magnet and held it above the mixture. At once a stir and motion began in the sand, and the tiny particles of iron flew to the magnet and clung to it. The master then said earnestly: "Can He who gave this power to dead matter not give still greater power to our souls when, from the glorified dust, they will have need of garments?"

This I believe. And this belief of mine is the object of my life, strength in temptation, and encouragement in all suffering.

My dear brethren. You know the splendid courage of Christopher Columbus which enabled him to start out to find a new continent never before seen or discovered by anyone.

*Novum desidero mundum*, he cried, "I seek a new world." And however much his companions grumbled, however little faith they possessed, whatever difficulties he had to contend with, he persevered. He persevered until he landed at that other shore that he had never seen.

We do not see the next world, at least not with our bodily

eyes. But we see it with the eyes of faith and seize upon it with the power of our mind.

We see it with the eyes of faith. One might say there is no gesture of our Lord that does not point to this world to come. One might say our Lord has no word that does not possess this keynote: Seek, before all else and above all else, at whatever sacrifice, this life hereafter.

And we capture it with the power of our mind. If God exists, there must be life everlasting before His throne. If God indeed exists, there must be a place where every hidden act of goodness receives its reward, but also every sin its punishment. If God exists, there must be a place where the longing that dwells in everyone is satisfied, the longing for perfect happiness and justice.

O blessed belief in life everlasting! To what stupendous heights it exalts us, man smitten to the dust by the thought of perishing! How it animates us! How it consoles us! How it encourages us!

In the preface of the funeral mass we find these beautiful words: "We give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty, everlasting God: through Christ our Lord. In whom the hope of a blessed resurrection hath shone upon us; that those whom the certainty of dying afflicteth, the promise of future immortality may console. For unto Thy faithful, O Lord, life is changed, not taken away: and the abode of this earthly sojourn being dissolved, an eternal dwelling is prepared in heaven."

I await this eternal dwelling place, I await this life everlasting. Life everlasting, where the reward of my faith will be knowledge, the reward of my hope possession, and the reward of my love, of my feeble love, will be the reciprocation and crown of the eternal love of the infinite God. Amen.

## VI

### THE GATE OF LIFE EVERLASTING: DEATH

"I BELIEVE in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." With these triumphant words our Creed ends. From this belief emanates strength, encouragement, and consolation for us in our spiritual life. Belief in life everlasting gives a purpose to our lives, strength in temptation, and consolation in suffering. Besides all these blessed fruits produced by our belief in life everlasting, is another fruit, the solution of the problem of death.

Death is mankind's most torturing problem. However greatly we have loved another, however firmly we have clung to another, however closely related we have been, death inevitably comes and at the grave speaks to us in hard tones: "Now you must say farewell: you must part."

Belief in life everlasting, however, consoles us, and it alone consoles us, in this grief. Belief in life everlasting can give an answer, and it alone can give an answer, to this most painful question. Belief in life everlasting solves the problem of death.

On the face of death I wish to project the light of life everlasting.

#### I

#### THE GATE OF LIFE EVERLASTING IS DEATH

A. Everyone must pass through the gate of death.

1) Ezechias, the king of the Jews, lay seriously ill when



Isaias went to him and told him the Lord's message: "Thus saith the Lord God: Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die and not live" (IV Kings, 20: 1).

"Thou shalt die." When these words fell from the prophet's lips, the king's soul shuddered. He turned his face to the wall and began to pray: "I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart and have done that which is pleasing before Thee (IV Kings, 20: 3). Thus the terrified king prayed and broke into bitter weeping.

"Thou shalt die," were the prophet's words. Who among us would not start weeping if he heard this? "Die? No. I do not want to die. I want to live." Would we not all say this?

2) Yes, man wants to live. Even in ancient times men tried their best to overcome disease. And when death triumphed after all, at least they built pyramids as sepulchers, marble tombstones, memorials, obelisks, epitaphs. But men longed to live; yet they died.

An Arabian proverb says: "If the house is finished one must die." So the Arab never completely finishes his house, yet he dies.

In Chicago, a convention of undertakers decided not to paint coffins black any more, but rather all the colors of the rainbow, in order to soften the depressing effect of funerals; yet people die there, too.

Once upon a time it was said that all roads lead to Rome. Yet in very truth we can rightly say that all roads lead to death. Nothing else is so certain as death. In German, if you wish to declare that something is quite certain, you say, *Tod-sicher*, "as certain as death."

"Vanity of vanities, said Ecclesiastes, vanity of vanities, and all is vanity. What hath a man more of all his labor that he taketh under the sun?" (Eccles. 1: 2, 3.) "I have seen all

things that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. 1: 14). "Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure." "And when I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and of the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun" (Eccles. 2: 10, 11).

Böcklin has painted an instructive picture of "the four ages of life." In the foreground a meadow is seen with a purling brook and two little children playing on its bank. In the center to the right a young woman stands with a bunch of fresh flowers in her hand. To the left a knight with courageous expression starts out upon his steed to battle with life. In the background on a little hill rising above a cave, sits a weary old man with bent back; leaning upon his stick he gazes into the distance: thus he awaits death who approaches unperceived from behind. From the cave a stream of water flows ceaselessly, the symbol of eternally fleeting time, and above the cave this inscription is seen: *Vita somnium breve*, "Life is a brief dream."

It is indeed a brief dream. The psalmist says to God: "A thousand years in Thy sight are as yesterday which is past, and as a watch in the night. Things that are counted nothing, shall their years be. In the morning man shall grow up like grass, in the morning he shall flourish and pass away; in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither" (Ps. 89: 4-6).

Life is a brief dream. From every dream one must awake. Death is an awaking from the earthly dream to the reality of life everlasting.

B. Through the gate of death everyone must pass, for "it is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9: 27), says Holy Writ.

1) Gerard Kempis, brother of Thomas, built himself a beautiful palace and invited his friends to come and admire it. Everyone praised the house, only one had some objection to make.

"Your palace is beautiful," he said; "but I should like to give you a piece of advice."

"And what is that?" asked his host.

"Wall up one door."

"Which one?"

"The one through which you will some day be carried to the cemetery."

But this door cannot be walled up.

Death is not merely an unpleasant guest whom we cannot get rid of. He is a member of the family, he belongs in the home, and knows no mercy with either young or old.

The hotels at some Italian health resorts display this proud inscription: *Qui si sana*, "here health is regained." Of course, some invalids do recover their health. But no sanatorium in the world would dare display this declaration: "Here people do not die." Such a sanatorium is not to be found.

2) Who does not shudder when in some cemetery he surveys death's dominion? How much pomp, how much power, how much prosperity and splendor lie buried beneath the silent tombstones, that seem to remind us of Holy Writ's warning: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccles. 1: 2).

3) Death is no respecter of persons, he is not biased in anyone's favor. Whom death will take and when, is God's secret, the secret we human beings will never solve.

There are thousands for whom death would be a release, thousands whose death would be a relief for those about them, and they live, live on for many years. Others, who seem to be needed by their family, others who could do so much good, who could labor so much for the Church of God—these must

go. Who can understand this? Only he who reads God's words in Holy Writ: "My thoughts are not your thoughts nor your ways My ways" (Is. 55: 8). "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9: 27). Therefore nothing is so certain in life as that we must die.

C. Since this is so, if we think in a serious Christian way we do well to become familiar with the thought and earnestly to prepare our souls for that tremendous hour.

1) The Christian way is often to ask the question: When will death come for me? On which day? In what guise? Slyly, like a thief? Will it fall upon me like a robber? At home? Or at the street corner? I do not know. Therefore I must always be prepared; my soul must be set in order. Death may come at any time.

Every day approximately 120,000 people die, every day 120,000 verdicts are passed. Among these are all kinds of men: counts, dukes, streetcleaners, stonebreakers, gipsies, all come to judgment. Now and again comes a king, a bishop, a pope. But they no longer bear any mark of distinction, there is no crown upon their heads, no papal tiara, no purple on their shoulders, no ermine, no evening clothes, no dinner-jacket; nothing but the snow-white robe of sanctifying grace. This is the Court dress of the heavenly kingdom.

To those who wear this "wedding garment" (Matt. 22: 12), no matter what they were in earthly life, the gates of God's kingdom are opened wide. Those who are without it, no matter how many decorations were carried on velvet cushions in their funeral processions, cannot escape the verdict. For we do not take anything with us there, no medals, automobiles, estates, checkbooks, nothing but our own inner values. What we had, we cannot take with us, only what we were. This is the Christian way of growing familiar with death.

2) The Jews of the Old Testament, according to the testi-

mony of Deuteronomy, had to go three times annually to the holy place appointed, and the sacred writer adds the warning: "No one shall appear with his hands empty before the Lord" (Deut. 16: 16). We, too, come before the Lord, but only once, at the time of our death. Let us not appear with empty hands.

Therefore it is a Christian proceeding to think of death and accept the scriptural warning: "O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end" (Deut. 32: 29).

Man is a master of self-deception, he can deceive himself in many ways, but never more fatally, never more painfully, than when he postpones repentance until the moment of death. It is almost an impossibility that anyone should be able to put his soul in order when he is enduring the torments of a fatal illness, if, when healthy, he never troubled about his soul at all. It is no wonder that in such cases the words which the Savior once spoke to His enemies are fulfilled: "I go, and you shall seek Me and you shall die in your sin" (John 8: 21).

Dear Lord, let not this threat be fulfilled in me. But rather: "Let my soul die the death of the just, and my last end be like to them" (Num. 23: 10).

## II

### HOW SHALL WE PASS THROUGH THE GATE OF DEATH?

"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. 9: 27). What will dying be like, and what will the judgment afterward be like?

A. What will dying be like?

1) Strictly speaking, earthly life itself is a continuous dying. A continual struggle against illness, against growing old, and against death. We are like a bird perched on a branch. Beneath it the flood increases, and the bird hops to a higher

branch. But when it feels that the topmost branch of the tree will also be flooded and there is no other way of escape, it spreads its wings and flies away. We, too, lengthen our lives in every way as long as possible. But when this is no longer possible, our soul spreads its wings and flies away: this is death.

2) The spiritual fortifying of the dying is one of the Catholic priest's most difficult, yet at the same time, most moving duties. The moment when the torch of earthly life prepares to flicker out is a very affecting one, and I, a priest of Christ, have to summon all my wisdom, all my love, all my strength that the soul may be at its clearest when the moment of passing comes, and may turn wholly to God in its last moments.

When the last tremor has passed through the mortal body, when the heart has throbbed for the last time and death has come, a nameless emotion, grief, distress, takes possession of each of us. Innumerable questions throng our minds: "Your body lies here dead, but what is happening now to your soul? What happened at the moment your soul left your body and appeared before its Judge? And what was the verdict? Where are you now? Immensely far away from us or quite near us? Do you still recognize us? Do you still remember us, your relatives, your friends? Or have you forgotten everyone and everything of this world?"

3) What can the moment of death be like? No one knows. Those who have experienced it can no longer tell us about it.

What is the moment like, when the instinct of preservation would make a final spasmodic clutch at life, but death intervenes. It is as though we had arrived at a dark tunnel; everything grows dim, everything disappears. Have you ever had the unpleasant dream of falling precipitately downward into a dark void? Our hands and feet are bound and we cannot move; we wish to scream, but not a sound escapes our lips,

we only fall downward, downward. Will the moment of death be like that? Who can say?

Have you ever been on the operating table in a hospital? An anesthetic is administered. The world begins to disappear. Our heads seem to grow larger; now it is as though we were flying, without wings, far far away into the endless distance. Will the moment of death be like that? Who could say? Only one who has been through it. But he cannot speak to us any more.

B. He does not speak to us because he is standing before the judgment seat of God, and now comes God's verdict.

1) At the moment of death the world to come is disclosed to the soul. But what will this first glimpse of the immeasurable realm of infinite light be like? Perhaps it will be like the falling of a rose into the sea when its white petals are embraced on all sides and rocked by the murmuring waves. Shall I perhaps in this way be permeated and transformed to dazzling brilliance amid the billowing ocean of light?

This is the "perpetual light" that we wish for our loved ones at the time of their burial. Light that is life-giving. Light that beatifies. Light that beautifies. Light that is the eternally blissful, infinitely lovely God.

2) And what will the soul see in this light? Before all else it will see itself: it will recognize itself, its faults, its virtues, its merits; it will recognize all this with a clear recognition such as it never attained on earth even by the most careful examination of conscience. What is its permanent value, how far has it succeeded in forming the picture of the eternal God in its soul, for this is the object of earthly life—this it will see at the moment of death with undimmed clearness.

3) And now, dear brethren, do not let us shrink from the task: let us imagine our own souls exposed to this penetrating

light. In it, every past memory, secret longing, hidden wickedness, will be disclosed. What we shall feel is called "the judgment of God."

Everything will come to mind, everything. The dreams of childhood, its desires, virtues, and faults. Words, yearnings, deeds which we thought we had finally forgotten. The years of our youth will come to mind, and the time of betrothal and of young married life.

We shall remember every place we have ever been to: the churches and the places of amusement, the confessionals and the dance-halls, the Eucharistic altar and the saloon bar.

And we shall remember everyone with whom we ever came in contact: our parents, our friends, our children, our husband or wife, our comrades, our accomplices, the fleeting acquaintances of frivolous nights, of sinful friendships kept secret. We will remember those to whom we were a guardian angel, those whom we led into sin. They did not wish to sin, but we persuaded them.

And every word, look, thought; everything we have read, our prayer books, and the indecent magazines, hands clasped in prayer, and thieving hands—everything will be remembered.

The inexorable radiance of perpetual light will be thrown upon our thoughts, words, deeds, glances, and our shortcomings, upon men, places and objects; and this we call "the judgment of God."

C. But what will happen after the judgment?

The judgment was the work of a moment. Of that moment when the ideal picture of what we ought to have become during our earthly life flashed upon us, and next to it appears our marred and disfigured life picture, showing us how in reality we have distorted the divine ideal; this is "the judgment of God."



The judgment upon those who have not realized anything of this ideal, upon whose soul God cannot recognize even the least resemblance to Himself, is final rejection, perdition.

Nevertheless, those upon whose soul glimpses of God's features can be found under all the rubble and dust, are not rejected, but after the improving, restorative work accomplished by purgatorial fire, God receives them into His eternal kingdom.

And if anyone dies who, through grace and his own co-operation, has made reparation here on earth for all his frailty and faults, that is, on his soul shines the resemblance to the divine ideal, in that moment he penetrates the beatifying perpetual light, God's eternal bliss, that we call heaven.

All this happens in a moment; in a shorter time than it takes for a man to lift his hand to throw away a withered flower, or to stretch out his hand to gather a lovely rose, fragrant in the June sunshine.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment."

My dear brethren. A strange thing happens to the river Rhone in the south of France, on the old boundary line between France and Savoy. Great rocks appear on both sides of the river, coming always nearer and nearer to its banks, until at last they meet above the water so that the river seems to be rushing into a rocky grave where it disappears from sight. The people call the Rhone at this point "the lost river" because it really does disappear from the face of the earth, not even its uproar is audible.

But is this river finally lost? Ah no. On the contrary, under the earth it now accomplishes its most wonderful work. In the bowels of the earth it bores through, and crumbles to dust the granite rocks that bar its way, and when one would

think that the earth had finally swallowed it, all at once it bursts forth triumphantly from its rocky grave and its cleansed waters roll on victoriously in the southern sunshine they have once more regained.

At the boundary line of our earthly life we, too, are swallowed up by the grave. The coffin closes down upon us, the river of our lives disappears into the depths of the earth, no sound is heard above the grave. Is our life finally lost? No. Death is only a gate through which we must pass; but beyond the threshold the victorious sunshine of the next world awaits us. Amen.

## VII

### DEATH VICTORIOUS

IN the Berlin National Gallery hangs a startling picture painted by Spangenberg: "The Triumphal Procession of Death."

In the painting, death is seen walking among men, shaking a bell in his bony hand; a vast crowd is following him.

Little children follow him with daisy-chains in their hands, that they had made while playing: but the deathbell interrupted their play and called them away.

A sturdy soldier follows death, the rifle with which he had fought in so many battles still in his hand: but all at once he, too, heard the bell and had to go.

A young girl follows death, her bridal veil falling in soft folds about her face: she heard the bell on her wedding-day and had to go.

Old and young, rich and poor, distinguished and common, are visible in the picture as, accompanied by a flight of crows, they rush unresistingly after death with his bell.

And a helpless old woman, a weary, wrinkled old woman, stretches out her hands longingly toward death, imploring him to take her with him: but he does not want her yet, he leaves her by the wayside.

We read the title under this startling picture: "The Triumphal Procession of Death."

Truly, dear brethren, a picture to make us think. Only from the pulpit can we speak of that painful and affecting

reality, of death. Elsewhere people shudder at the thought. Elsewhere they become pale and upset if anyone warns them of the end of earthly life.

But the splendid value of our Christian faith is shown by its not avoiding this most serious question, by its daring to face the serious reality of death, and also by its ability to draw courage and peace even from this depressing fact, from the triumphant procession of death. Christianity clearly points out the startling truth that the fact of death is certain and that the hour of death is uncertain. But it does not make us despair, for at the same time it encourages and consoles us.

Everyone will come to the end of his life, but no one knows when. It is certain that all of us will die, but it is quite uncertain when we shall die. These are two truths that no one can doubt.

## I

### IT IS CERTAIN THAT ALL OF US WILL DIE

No one can question the fact that all, without exception, are sentenced to death. Holy Writ says clearly: "Remember that death is not slow . . . for the covenant of this world shall surely die" (Ecclus. 14: 12). Whether you are rich or poor, learned or ignorant, healthy or ill, a grayheaded old man or a crying baby in arms, whether you live on land or water, in the temperate or in the torrid zone, working or unemployed: it is all the same. We all shall die. "Remember, man, that thou art dust and into dust thou shalt return," our holy religion says to us on Ash Wednesday.

This is a painful, upsetting truth, but we cannot alter it. Whether we think of it or not, whether we occupy ourselves with it or not, whether we prepare for it or not, some day the Lord will knock at our door. If you have been king, you

will die; if you have been pope, you will die; if you have been a poor struggler, you will die. You possess great wealth: do you die too? You do. You are a poor beggar: do you die too? You do.

A. Thousands of years ago in Africa, on the banks of the Nile, mighty pharaohs reigned. Millions bowed abjectly before them. And there beside them were their wives, queens adorned with gold and precious gems, a host of servants waiting to obey their every behest; slave girls combed their long, silky hair. And they also died.

When they died, monuments were erected to them, that were to be worthy of their famous names, where they could sleep their eternal sleep in peace.

This happened four to five thousand years ago. And then? Then archaeologists of the last century discovered these pharaohs' tombs, excavated all their treasures, and the ancient dead are now exhibited in the museums of various cities all over the world.

In any of these museums you may see people standing before a royal mummy in a glass case, looking at it curiously. Are they looking at a king? No. At a handful of dust.

And this ancient corpse looks back at us from its empty eye-sockets that seem as though they were looking from a great distance. And then those compressed lips begin to speak: they tell us a long, ancient story; the beginning chants the hymn of life, speaking to us of pleasures, pomp, and glory. And the end? The end is a softly whispered message: Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return.

B. After speaking of the pharaohs, let me speak of other kings. One was Louis XIV, king of France, who is usually called the "sun king" because of his great splendor and magnificence.

He was a favorite of fortune. His armies passed from con-

quest to conquest. Poets, noblemen, women, one more beautiful than the other, surrounded him with flattery. He built palace after palace. The buildings he erected are counted today among the most beautiful edifices of France. When we see his castle and gardens at Versailles, near Paris, we are speechless in admiration. And he certainly took his share of the good things of life. He did not want to spend a moment without pleasure.

Once, however, someone came. Someone who was mightier and stronger than the "sun king": he struck with the scythe that no one in this world can avoid. And the king was laid to rest in the French royal vaults. Well, gay King Louis, now enjoy yourself. What? You can do so no longer? But you lived for pleasure, King Louis, now amuse yourself. What? You can do so no longer? You cannot even move?

Yet he had one more journey still before him. The French Revolution came and broke open the royal vaults. King Louis' mouldering body was also found; on his feet the highheeled shoes that he had worn in life in order to appear taller than he really was. They took his bones, threw them into a great ditch and poured slaked lime upon them, and the bubbling, seething lime seemed to hiss the sad words, "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return."

C. After speaking of pharaohs and kings, shall I also speak of emperors? In the heart of Vienna, the Austrian capital, stands the Capuchin Church. Beneath this building lie the great arched vaults that are the burial-place of the Austrian emperors and Hungarian kings.

Two rows of imposing coffins line the walls: ten, twenty, thirty, who knows their number? There side by side lie emperors, kings, archdukes and archduchesses.

Beneath one great memorial lie Maria Theresa and her husband, Emperor Francis, and their children; after them

come the others, right to the latest coffins: to crown-prince Rudolph, Queen Elizabeth I, Francis Joseph. The former possessors of vast temporal power and pomp enclosed in this cold crypt, buried, forgotten, moldering to dust.

When standing there between the coffins of crown-prince Rudolph and Queen Elizabeth, by the statue of the sorrowful Virgin that Hungarian women erected to the memory of Queen Elizabeth, into the deathly silence of the crypt the busy hum of the outer world penetrates, the horns of autos, the clanging of electric street cars, the rumble of carts, the noise of men. Our glance falls on these quiet coffins, and we seem to hear words from their depths, shouted into our ears in that formidable silence: Today you are still king, tomorrow nothing. Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return.

D. And shall I speak of the czars? When a Russian czar died, it was the custom to embalm the body, clothe it in a magnificent uniform, lay it in an imposing coffin and place it in the imperial crypt at Petropavlovsk to "eternal rest."

To eternal rest? By no means. The Soviet lords had need of money. They sent a committee down into the realm of deathly silence. One after the other the coffins were broken open.

Alexander III's coffin is broken open. There he lies in his glittering military uniform. From his breast they tear decorations set with diamonds, take from his hand the sword inlaid with brilliants, and hasten to the next coffin. Now it is Alexander II's turn. Now Nicholas I. They come to the coffin of the Czarina Catherine I and tear an immeasurably valuable diamond necklace from the neck of the dead woman. And as the hammerblows of these despoilers of the dead, who are void of all human feeling, ceaselessly resound in the deathly silence, it is again as though we heard the warning cry of

transitory life: Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return.

E. Shall I give one more example? Yes, but no longer of kings.

Imagine that the world is a hundred years older. It is the middle of the next century. Will this be? Probably. Will there also be frivolous people who live and enjoy themselves and take no thought for their souls? Surely there will be. But who will not be? I shall not be. Nor you. Nor anyone who is here present. We shall then be in our graves, at rest in our graves.

Rest? That is not well said. By that time perhaps our bones will have been exhumed to make place for others. Your house may be still standing, but it will be no longer yours: you will be dust. This church will stand, it will be filled, but you will not be here: you will be dust. Here someone will preach, but it will not be I who do so: I shall be dust. Someone will celebrate mass, but not he who celebrated it today. Young boys will be servers, but not those who served today: those too will already have become dust.

“Oh, death! how bitter is the remembrance of thee” (Ecclus. 41: 1), we could cry in the words of Holy Writ. A dreadful, an appalling thought. One feels uncomfortable, seeks a means of escape, and begins to argue with oneself: “Ah, why are you anxious? True, some day we all have to die. But who knows when that will be?”

## II

### IT IS UNCERTAIN WHEN WE SHALL DIE

Yet when we try to quiet the unrest of our souls in this way, perhaps we do not even think how very right we are. We are right, but with a difference in emphasis. With a differ-



ence that does not quiet us, but overwhelms us with still greater despair. "Who knows when death will come?" You are right: "*Who knows when death will come?*"

A. One thing is dreadfully certain: that we must die. All the rest is dreadfully uncertain: when, where, in what manner, in what spiritual state. *Mors certa, hora incerta* says the inscription on a tower-clock in Leipzig.

1) When shall I die? Perhaps on a sunny day in spring when the trees are putting forth new leaves and breaking into blossom. Will they then close my eyes? Shall I fall like a ripe apple from the tree on a sultry summer day? I do not know. Will they lower me into the depths of the grave when the autumn leaves are falling? Or perhaps on a freezing afternoon in winter when a pall of soft white snow will cover my grave in a few minutes? I do not know, I do not know.

"Between the cradle and the grave  
Only one short step is made."

2) And where shall I die?

A shopkeeper once asked a sailor: "Where did your father die?"

"He was drowned at sea."

"And your grandfather?"

"He was drowned, too."

"And you are not afraid of going to sea?" the shopkeeper asked in astonishment.

But the sailor replied: "Where did your father die?"

"In bed."

"And your grandfather?"

"He died in bed, too."

"And you are not afraid of going to bed every night?"

Yes, dear brethren: where shall I die? In a quiet room, or

shall I fall dead in the noisy street perhaps? At home or in a hospital? On land or at sea? I do not know.

3) And how shall I die? After long suffering, or suddenly, in a few minutes? In the quiet weakness of old age or in tormenting pain? Surrounded by my relations, or forsaken by everyone? Shall I die a natural death, or in consequence of a railway accident, or perhaps under the wheels of an automobile. I do not know, I do not know.

4) However, after all, dear brethren, this is not important. It is all the same when I shall die and where I shall die and in what manner I shall die, if I can reply to the fourth question: In what spiritual condition will death find me? This is not all the same. Alas, if death should overtake me in sin. This is not all the same.

Yet you will die in the spiritual condition in which you have lived. Death will be only an echo of our lives. We cannot hope that God will perform a miracle for our sakes.

If all our lives we have not received the sacraments, then we cannot hope to receive them at the last moment.

If we have sinned all our lives and have not cared for our souls, if while in health we have not taken time to render a sincere account of our sins in the confessional, then we cannot hope that God will rescue us by a miracle, and that what we neglected to do while in health we can now make amends for while suffering dreadful bodily agony.

No. We cannot hope for this. Our end will be what our lives have been. Alas, if death overtakes us in sin.

B. The postman often brings us mourning-cards that tell us of the death of friends and acquaintances: "It has pleased divine Providence to take our beloved father to his eternal rest after long suffering." Or: "The undersigned announce with sorrowing hearts that . . ." We read these cards with deep emotion, put them aside and—continue our work.

But some day a mourning-card will be printed that you will not be able to read, because your name will stand in thick letters in the center of it. When the postman takes these mourning-cards to their destination, you will be already lying dead in a tiny room. Stiff and cold, and as pale as if you were made of wax. But of all this you will know nothing. Around you relations and friends will be weeping, but you will hear nothing of this.

The priest will come and say to those present: *Oremus pro fidelibus defunctis* ("Let us pray for the faithful departed"). But you will hear nothing of all this: if you lived a good life, well for you; if you died in sin, alas for you.

Slowly the funeral procession will make its way to the cemetery. Once more the sad chant will resound: "Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death." But you will not hear this: if you lived a good life, well for you; if you died in sin, alas for you.

The mourners slowly disperse. And you remain there alone in the quiet cemetery. The evening breeze flutters the white veil at the head of your grave. I read the inscription on it: Lived 17 years. So young. Or do I not see well? Lived 71 years? It is all the same. For you it is quite all the same.

Hardly a few years, and you are dust. Time passes over your grave, centuries, millenniums pass. The flowers that bloomed above you have faded long ago. Perhaps a town has been built over the cemetery where you were buried, and in the house erected above your grave people are living; people who laugh as once you did, who are corrupt and wicked, as once you were, who die, as once you did and become dust and ashes: but your soul lives eternally, and as you lived on earth, so your life will be in eternity: if you lived a good life, well for you; if you died in sin, alas for you.

C. We see and feel death's irresistible sway, we see Holy

Writ's words confirmed day by day: "All flesh shall fade as grass and as the leaf that springeth out on a green tree: some grow and some fall off: so is the generation of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born" (Ecclus. 14: 18, 19). We experience the truth of this on all sides, yet we see that there are people who still do not believe this. They do not believe that they will also die.

"But that is impossible," you say. "Such a manifestly crazy person does not exist, who would say seriously that he will not die."

Well, that is true, no sane person would say it, but there are many, many millions who live as frivolously, as irresponsibly, as if they believed that they would never die.

Yet I cannot imagine anything more appalling than when someone who does not believe in life everlasting begins to grow old and ill. When such a one has to recognize the fact that the years are passing, that the course of his life is nearly run. And nothing helps, nothing is of any use, rouge is of no use, nor hair-dye, nor the most modern clothes, nor mountain air, nor sea-baths. The end draws ever nearer and nearer, the end of which they never wished to think. And now they see that their hands are empty, alas, dreadfully empty.

D. Now answer one question, dear brethren. If you had to go today? If death should come for you within an hour?

If the Lord should send His angel to you today with the message: "Your stewardship is at an end. Leave everything and come to render your account." What would you do?

Could you reply calmly: "Yes, my Lord, I am ready, everything is in order, I go."

Could you part from everyone with a quiet conscience, and ought you not first to become reconciled to a few with whom you are on bad terms?

Could you part from them forever and ought you not to

restore to them this or that of which you have deprived them?

Could you enter into the Lord's presence with a pure soul and would not your heart be heavy with the memory of many sins committed long ago and still unconfessed?

Could you stand before God: "Father, Thou hast called me, behold Thy faithful child."

Yes? Then all is well. Rejoice and be glad.

But if there is anyone who would be startled by such a message; if there are any to whom it would come unexpectedly and find them unprepared; if there are any with whom not everything is in order, whom this or that neighbor could accuse before God, whose souls are blackened by many sins, unconfessed and unforgiven. I earnestly beg them to put everything in order, to go to confession, to go to confession at once. I beg them not to try God's merciful patience any longer and to think of their unhappy souls.

Let them remember that our earthly lives "are passed away like a shadow . . . and as a ship that passeth through the waves, whereof when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found" (Wis. 5: 9, 10). Let them remember that "life is but wind" (Job 7: 7), and "our years shall be considered as a spider" (Ps. 89: 10). Let them remember that "it is not in man's power to stop the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death" (Eccles 8: 8). Let them remember "if the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall there shall it be" (Eccles 11: 3). That is to say, let us remember that it is woe to us if death overtakes us in sin, because as we die so shall we be judged, and as we have lived so we shall die.

My dear brethren. One of the marble memorials in the famous cemetery at Genoa portrays a dead father lying in a coffin. Between the dead father and the weeping girl stands

Christ, His hands raised in benediction above them both, and in the background these three Christian words glitter like a ray of sunshine breaking through from the other world: *Ego sum resurrectio* ("I am the resurrection").

My brethren. We human beings address one another by high-sounding titles, we make becks and bows to one another, we fear one another: yet there are only two truly great powers in the world, two tremendous lords: death and Christ.

Death, who never sleeps, never rests, but mows down his share of human beings day by day: 120,000 persons daily. And wherever these 120,000 funeral processions pass—in villages and towns, on land or at sea—everywhere in the world at sight of them people are deeply affected, they remove their hats, babbling tongues become silent, rosy faces become pale wherever his majesty Death appears.

Death thus reigned supreme for many thousands of years and held his triumphant funeral processions, until 1900 years ago, outside the small town of Naim, one such funeral procession was met by Someone. By Someone who stopped the procession wending its way to the grave, stepped to the young man lying dead on his bier, and said to him: "Young man, I say to thee, arise" (Luke 7: 14). As though some mighty shudder ran through the world, the power of death was broken.

Since then also the years rush by. Since then also funeral bells are tolled on earth. But since then the oppressive knowledge of our brief earthly span of existence no longer weighs so heavily upon us. Since then we know that man's life, however tiny a rivulet of existence it may be, is not swept into the uncertain darkness of oblivion by the rushing years, but the tiny vein of each one's life flows into the limitless ocean of existence that we call God.

Only the rivulet that has accumulated dirt in its passage

through the earth fears the translucent sea. But to those that are able to cast from them the dust and dirt collected on their way and arrive crystal-clear at the crystal ocean, beyond all transiency, beyond every grave, beyond all dissolution, Christ's words will ring out encouragingly, consolingly: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11: 25). And Holy Writ's consolation will resound: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Apoc. 14: 13); "The souls of the just are in the hand of God" (Wis. 3: 1); "The just shall live for evermore, their reward is with the Lord" (Wis. 5: 16).

My brethren. Let us live as those who know that some day they will die, that we may die as those who know that they will live forever.

Let us live in God's love, that we may die in God's grace. Amen.

## VIII

### DEATH THE TEACHER

ONE of Christianity's most profound thinkers, most brilliant geniuses, was undoubtedly St. Augustine. His writings contain a large number of original and pithy sayings which crystallize weighty truths. How simple and striking, for instance, are his words, *Sit mors pro doctore* ("Let death be your teacher").

"Doctor Death," "Professor Death"—assuredly a strange idea. Hitherto we have known Professor Jones, Professor Smith, and others, who teach history, political economy, Latin, Greek, chemistry, and so on. But now comes Professor Death. And what subject does he wish to teach? His subject is life; for that is what St. Augustine meant: Let death be your teacher; let death teach you how to live right.

Today, therefore, I take my hearers to this strange professor, to his classroom. Let us listen attentively to what "Professor Death" teaches us. He can speak all languages, and in every land he has a teacher's certificate. Is there an inch of soil in the world where no graves have been dug? Perhaps so. But to find such spots we would have to go to the uninhabited corners of the earth. Wherever there is a grave, there is our professor's rostrum, there sits Death, the great teacher of life. He summarizes his lectures under three headings: Good people, learn of me what a nothingness life is, what a treasure life is, and what a responsibility life is!



## I

## THE NOTHINGNESS OF LIFE

Death's first teaching is this: the nothingness of life.

A. *Sta viator* ("Halt, traveler"), is the warning we read on ancient tombstones. "Pilgrim on earth, halt," is also what death teaches; halt and call to mind how ephemeral everything is, everything. Almighty God alone is eternal.

1) Life flies, quickly it slips from our grasp, however convulsively we would hold it. It is like the flight of an arrow, like a soaring bird. Even if you were to live in a palace and have every luxury that heart can desire, and the best of physicians to treat you with the most expensive remedies, this would all be of no avail.

2) And how uncertain life is! In 1933 an airplane flying from Vienna to Venice crashed. Among its passengers was a young author who suffered serious injuries and died on the evening of the same day. He had flown that day from Berlin to Vienna and after two hours' rest, had continued his flight to Venice. In Vienna he spent the two hours with an acquaintance. They went by automobile to an elegant restaurant. During the meal the young author spoke enthusiastically of the great progress made by technology:

"How powerful the human mind is, after all," he said. "This morning I had breakfast in Berlin; now at noon I lunch in Vienna; this evening I shall dine and listen to the music in one of the restaurants on St. Mark's Square in Venice."

That evening he appeared before the throne of the eternal Judge, and not in a restaurant on St. Mark's Square.

3) "Professor Death" here descends from his professorial chair, goes among the graves, opens them, and makes the dead lying in them to speak.

The young say: "How deceived we were when we counted on a long life and did not believe what we often read inscribed on old clocks: *Jede Stunde bringt die Kunde* ("Every hour something new"). How empty our entire earthly life was! The decades passed like smoke and shadow, and now we see how true the epitaph is that says: *Homo humus, fama fumus, finis cinis*, "man is earth, fame is smoke, the end is dust."

The poor speak and say: "For us death was a release." The rich say: "Not all our wealth was able to save us from this place."

The mighty Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, was right when he commanded that he be placed in his coffin in such a way that his empty hands should hang over the sides of it; let the people see that the mighty king departs with empty hands and can take nothing with him.

Thus the dead speak to us.

"Professor Death," certainly you teach us well.

B. If only your instructive words could be heard by those who live with every fiber of their being for this world only.

1) It is a pity that modern man avoids the thought of death so carefully. He does not like to meet death. The ancient Romans did not fear death. They dug long rows of graves beside the most frequented highways that passersby should see them day by day. Nor did the ancient Christians fear death. Do not think it strange if I say: It would be good for the present-day man to have his attention called to graves sometimes, to visit the sick, the afflicted, and the dead. At every street corner pleasure offers itself: the theater, motion picture theater, dance, bar. In every store, in every fashion display, the world of pleasure offers its wares. Is it any wonder that man forgets there is another world, a world of privation,

suffering, and disease? Is it any wonder that death has to teach those who are unwilling to learn in any other way, that this fleeting life is not true life?

2) And death teaches all this.

It teaches us to be humble, but at the same time confident, too. It teaches us that life is nothing, but at the same time it teaches us what a treasure life is. It teaches us not to become vain, because earthly life is so short; but to be filled with joy because eternal life is so long.

It teaches us that we are citizens of two worlds, but that we cannot find an abiding home in both of them. The visa on our earthly passport authorizes us to "pass through." The permanent domicile to which we are enroute is in the world beyond. Here we are wanderers; in the beyond our permanent home awaits us. Here is the dream, there the reality. Here is the shadow, there the perfection of existence.

3) And then "Professor Death" raises his voice again: Good people; if all this is really so, how can you live as though the contrary were true? How can you live as though your one and only thought were of this world, of daily bread, of business, of pleasure, of the theater, of entertainment? These are your only desires, your only ambitions, your only anxieties. Of what comes after this, of what comes after the sods have fallen with dull thuds upon your coffins, of this truly important, fateful fact you hardly think at all.

A remarkable thing was printed in a certain newspaper published over a hundred years ago. (*Warendorfer Wochenblatt*, July 25, 1835.) It speaks of how a person buried while in a trance could escape if he regained consciousness in the grave. A string must be drawn through a pipe placed in the earth, writes the paper. The string must reach to the dead man's hand, and a bell must be attached to the other end

above the earth's surface. If the dead person awakes all he has to do is to pull the string; the consequent signal would at once bring someone to rescue him from the grave.

Are people not strange, dear brethren? It hardly ever happens that anyone is buried in a trance; they want to provide for that remote contingency. It is quite certain, however, that at the moment of death everyone will awake to find himself standing before the judgment seat of God. Yet so many care nothing whatever about this and do not insure themselves for this event.

Let us listen to death's teaching and let us never forget what we are and what we shall become. Our hearts belong to God, not to the world; let us not allow its sins to soil them. Our souls belong to God, not to the world; let us not allow its illusive castles-in-the-air to take us captive. Our gold and our treasures we cannot take into God's presence. Nor our palaces and automobiles. Then what? Only our souls.

The one treasure, the one thing of value that we take with us is our good deeds.

## II

### THE TREASURE OF LIFE

When "Professor Death" has made us so serious, he produces his second prescription. On the second prescription this is written: Life is short, indeed, but it is also a precious treasure. The past is no longer yours, the future is not yet yours; so use what is yours, use today.

A. The past is no longer yours.

1) Surely no one can see the passing of the years without a bit of sadness on the anniversary of his birthday or on New Year's Eve if he looks back on the years of his life that have flown away so rapidly. How dim every past joy and sorrow,

every task and pleasure, every success and failure, has become. If we look back on our past life, much of it fades into a mist or fog. We still speak of last summer, of a journey we made last spring, perhaps of some greater event. But of what happened several years ago, our memories are, for the most part, vague and dim and uncertain.

2) Time is a mystery. Behind us lies the past; that is no longer ours. Before us lies the future; that is not yet ours. In our grasp we hold the present, a moment of time that slips from our hands even while we grasp it.

Gazing into the darkness ahead, we try, at the beginning of each new year, to see what secrets the future holds. But we can see nothing.

B. We see nothing because the future is not yet ours.

1) How a person encourages and consoles himself: The past year was certainly bitter, but here is the new. In it things must become easier, something unexpected will happen. But time flies past and does not trouble about human beings, neither about those who would like to hasten its flight nor about those who would like to retard it.

The young say impatiently: Oh, if only I could be five years older, if only I had finished my examinations, if only I had my diploma, if only I had a good position. The old say resignedly: If only I were five years younger; then my legs were not so stiff, my breathing was not so difficult, and my hands did not tremble so much. Time does not bother about all that, but rushes on its way.

2) "If only I could know more of the mysterious future. If only I could see what awaits me in life. What danger, what fate, what losses. Why does God not allow us to see into the future?"

So say many people who do not reflect how appalling would be a knowledge of the future. How we might be dis-

heartened, how dreadful it might be to know more of the future than what God has seen fit to impart to us!

The psychological and pedagogical tact shown by Christianity in this question is without its equal. It teaches just so much of our future fate as is necessary to allow us to work with hearts full of hope. Not the merciless blows of an iron-fisted blind fate form our futures, it proclaims, but the fatherly hand of God who provides abundantly for all His children. And His loving heart ordered that we should not know the details of the future awaiting us, that our working strength might not be impaired, that we might not lose courage. We see the final goal where every road ends, but we do not see the road we shall travel. We see only one thing clearly: that at the price of honest endeavor we can gain eternal life.

The past has flown quickly, the future is not yet in my hand; but today is mine. Today I may still love God: I do not know how long I may do so. I may still serve God: but I do not know how long I may do so. Today I may still make reparation for the past: I do not know how long I may do so. Today I may still do penance here for my past sins: but I do not know how long I may do so.

Hence death, at the same time that it shows us the nothingness of life, shows us also what a precious treasure life is. It is a battlefield, an arena, a trial of patience lasting for thirty, fifty, seventy years. On living it rightly depends the whole of life everlasting.

### III

#### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LIFE

This is death's third teaching: The responsibility of this life.

A. This responsibility makes the hour of death so hard.

1) What hurts us most in death? Is it that we must part from our loved ones, from our sphere of work, from our property? Undoubtedly these things do hurt us. If small children and a widow will be left, the thought of their orphaned state grieves us; if aged parents will be left, their uncertain future causes us grief. If half-finished ambitious plans are left, we are pained to leave the work unaccomplished. If we must leave some laboriously acquired property, the thought of unknown fate pains us. Yet all this is not what hurts us most.

2) Then what is most painful in death? Is it life's final resistance to its passing? Is it the violent disruption of the union of body and soul? This, too, is painful, and for this reason death is bitter. Yet this is not what hurts most in death.

3) Do you know what it is that hurts most? Our life's account that we are now closing, our balance sheet. The hour of reckoning that awaits us. The judgment seat before which we shall presently stand. Our responsibility in God's sight for every word and deed committed during our earthly lives—this is what makes death bitter. The question that stares us in the face: What will happen to us now? Whither shall we go?

What will happen to us? This is what a nervous lady asked when an electric railway car was traveling down a steep mountain side.

"Oh, conductor, what would happen to us if the electric brake should fail to work?"

"Never fear, madam, we still have an automatic emergency brake."

"But what would happen to us if the emergency brake also failed to work?" the passenger nervously asked.

"Well, that would not matter very much either; we would still have the hand-brake."

“But what would happen to us if the hand-brake also failed?”

At that the conductor scratched his head, and answered: “What would happen to us then, madam? Well, some of us would go to heaven and some to hell.”

He was right. And in his answer do you not sense the responsibility that rests on each of us? In it we hear our Lord’s warning: “Be you then also ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come” (Luke 12: 40).

B. Now, brethren, reply to my serious question: Are you living in the light of this responsibility? Are your affairs in order? Are you always prepared for death?

For thousands of years people have been dying. Yet death always comes to them unexpectedly. Tell me; if you had to balance your life accounts today, are you prepared to do so? Tell me; are all your affairs in order?

1) Are your money affairs in order? Will there be no contention at your graveside? Have you in your possession nothing that belongs to another? Is no disorder to be found among your obligations? Will not the whole outward appearance of your life collapse at your death, and your relatives have to say at your funeral: “Alas, why did you bring this upon us?”

2) Have you nothing of importance to say to anyone? Tell me; could you really not write that letter today, that letter of explanation, that letter begging forgiveness?

Alas, how much people quarrel with one another! How they embitter one another’s lives over trifles! Two bald-headed men are capable of quarreling about a comb. What trifles two brothers can quarrel about! Children and their parents are sometimes estranged for years on account of something utterly insignificant.

All at once death intervenes, and they come to their senses when it is too late.



Recently an old man was buried, and as his relatives made their way home from the funeral they discussed him most touchingly: "What a good man he was, he never harmed anyone." But why did they discover this only after his funeral? Why only after death, when they so often embittered him in his lifetime?

"He was a good man." What a lamentable truth, that many perceive this and say it only when it is too late! How many would be gentler, more forgiving, more forbearing, more loving when it is too late, when it is no longer possible to be so!

3) However, a still more important question arises: Is your soul in order? Do you often think of St. Paul's warning: "Yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say: Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them" (I Thess. 5: 2, 3).

Mazarin, Louis XIV's great minister, had a stroke of apoplexy while playing cards. "Perhaps it is only a slight indisposition," he thought, and ordered his servant to hold his arm for him that he might continue the game. In vain. The cards fell from his hand and he sank back in his chair. His last words were: "My poor soul, what will become of my poor soul?"

Think of your past life, and you will exclaim: "My poor soul, what will become of my poor soul?"

Into the other mysterious life, into the grave, that long, narrow pit, we can take nothing. Nor can anyone accompany us. Not even our friends, our relatives, our brethren, our parents.

It is dreadful. Then what accompanies us on this uncertain journey? Not our knowledge. Not our good looks, nor our sturdy muscles. Must we stand empty-handed before God?

No, brethren. There is something that accompanies us;

but only one thing. It goes with us to our grave, beyond the grave, right up to the throne of the eternal God, and there it will speak for us.

Who or what is it? Holy Writ, speaking of the dead, says: "Their works follow them" (Apoc. 14: 13). Our deeds we take with us.

The glass of water we gave to a thirsty soul, the piece of bread we gave to a beggar, these will go with us and speak for us. Everything we did to help our less fortunate fellow man will accompany us and plead in our behalf. Every kind word and compassionate deed, every comforting glance and loving thought of ours, our struggles to resist temptation, all will accompany us and be our one treasure. "Their works follow them" (Apoc. 14: 13).

My dear brethren. If you walk about the streets of Rome, you are made dizzy by the rush of traffic, dazzled by the glittering, splendid life. How many projects, how much endeavor, how much human beauty and brilliance!

When you then ascend one of the seven hills and survey the town from a distance, nothing of this great traffic is seen, no noise is heard, no earthly striving. The houses of this metropolis huddle together like little colored matchboxes. But above them, with reassuring dignity, rises the gigantic cupola of St. Peter's, pointing to the heights.

To such heights today's sermon led: to the heights of "Professor Death's" rostrum, to the heights of the cemetery. If we survey life from these heights, we see how all human striving, planning, and might sink to a little mound of earth on a grave. At such a time it is good to perceive the cupola of our holy faith, rising with comforting calmness above the realm of death.

The thought of death makes everyone shudder. Even be-

lievers? Even those whose sacred hope is that after death life everlasting awaits them? Is it possible that they, too, fear death?

Yes, it is possible. The instinct of self-preservation is strong in every creature, it is life's protecting shield. The body instinctively draws back from disintegration, and however much anyone thinks of death, however zealous and religious he may be, he cannot entirely rid himself of this natural dread. Death was not created by God: sin brought it in its train. Our human natures fear it and try to escape from it. Hence it is comprehensible that the life-instinct of even the most devout believers protests against death and shudders at the thought of it.

But stronger than the strongest life-instinct is our faith: death is only a transition from one form of existence to another, when we cast off one worn garment and put on a new one in its stead, "that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5: 4). Death is not a sinking into nothingness, into Nirvana, but the beginning of real life. Here we walk in shadow, there in sunshine; here in strife, there in God's peace; here in a foreign land, there in the Father's house; here we believe, there we know.

This belief does not allow us to despair, but teaches us to pray:

Dear Lord, I beg, if it is good in Thy sight, let not my death-struggle be torturing. If it is good in Thy sight, let not my fear of death be tormenting. If it is good in Thy sight, let not death overtake me in a strange country, where I am alone. All this I beg, my Lord.

But more than all else, one thing I beg. Do not allow death to overtake me without my having made my confession, without my having received the sacraments, without my having gained Thy pardon. Allow me after my last communion

to repeat with a tranquil soul the aged Simeon's words: "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace" (Luke 2: 29). And that I may then add: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23: 43); and as an echo hear Thy words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25: 21). Amen.

## IX

### THE WARNING OF DEATH

HAVE you ever stood at the middle of a bridge when great blocks of ice were being swept under it by the water? If you have not, sometime stand on a bridge when the river is covered with masses of floating ice and look fixedly at the drifting ice. You need not look long; at once you will feel that the bridge is moving under you and that you are being swept away by the current, and you will almost clutch the railing of the bridge to prevent yourself from being drawn away.

This feeling of uncertainty takes possession of our souls as often as we think of the transient character of all things human, of life's hurrying river, as often as we think of death; as often as we feel how the boundless ocean of time sweeps the swiftly rolling waves of life under us. At such times we feel as though we, too, were being swept along helplessly by the current, and instinctively we take refuge in the belief in eternal life, the only sure support to which mortal man can cling.

However earnest and honest our lives may be, we cannot deny that we Christians are deeply touched by the passing of time. We, too, are shaken by the knowledge that death is inevitable. We do not, however, let this mood become foolishly sentimental, but strive to understand the admonition it contains. Death admonishes us of our responsibility and of our duty.

## I

## THE PASSING OF TIME

As often as we see death's harvest around us we, too, feel the icy breath of things transient. At such times we see the truth of psalm 101: "In the beginning, O Lord, Thou foundest the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish but Thou remainest; and all of them shall grow old like a garment, and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art always the selfsame and Thy years shall not fail" (Ps. 101: 26-28). How true this psalm is!

A. Everything becomes old and changes.

1) The whole universe in which we live becomes old. The earth grows old and changes, the heavenly bodies grow cool, the warmth of the sun decreases. A decade or a century does not count much in the life of the universe, but the unceasing passage of centuries and millenniums counts. The earth and all the created world gradually grows old.

2) Of course many people do not take this very tragically. The sun is growing old and will sometime become cold. Well, let it. The earth is growing old and sometime the fuel supply will be exhausted. Well, it will be exhausted. All this would not cause us anxiety, if we did not perceive something else as well. We cannot perceive that the earth and the sun are growing older, but we see something else most plainly; we see that people grow old: our friends and relations; and we see that we, too, are growing old.

"Oh, how many gray hairs you have!" we exclaim when we meet some friend whom we have not seen for six months or so.

"Where have you been that you are all dressed up?" we ask.

"I have been to Charlie's wedding."

"Is he already a married man? I used to play with him when he was a little fellow in short pants. How old we are getting!"

Yes, we are growing old. Everything changes and grows old like a garment.

B. But Thou, O Lord, art always the selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail. Only God does not grow old. With God "there is no change nor shadow of alteration" (James 1: 17). "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity and to eternity Thou art God" (Ps. 89: 2). "For a thousand years in Thy sight are as yesterday which is past" (Ps. 89: 4).

Hence it is a beautiful custom that, when hurrying autos and crowded streetcars pass a church, men who are jostling one another in the struggle to make a livelihood, become silent for a moment and raise their hats or make the sign of the cross. At such times ephemeral man pays respect to the only eternal God.

When everything around us decays and the screech-owl voice of destruction screams at us on all sides, then we turn to this eternal God and grasp His hand more firmly. We, who are but short-lived, weak creatures, we trust in the God who is always the selfsame and whose years shall not fail. We trust in the God who was mighty enough to call this stupendously vast world into existence from the void. We trust in the God who was mighty enough to keep it in existence for thousands and thousands of years. We trust in the God without whose knowledge not a hair of our heads is harmed and not a sparrow falls.

Therefore we must not be weakly sentimental at the sight of death's dominion. It should bring two things to our minds: our responsibility and our duty; our responsibility with regard to earthly life, and our duty with regard to God.

## II

## DEATH WARNS US OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The first thought that takes possession of us at the sight of death is one of responsibility for the account we must some day render.

A. My life is a book, every page is a year. And after I have completed my life on earth, this book will be opened in heaven. The book is "the book of life" (Apoc. 20: 12), in which everything is written.

1) Everything. How appalling only to think of it! Every word, act, and thought of mine, that perhaps I have forgotten long ago, is written down. Yet it will be so. Our blessed Lord repeatedly warns us that He will demand a reckoning from us.

A wealthy man makes big plans for the future: he will eat, drink, and be merry. But God says to him: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee." "Give an account of thy stewardship" the Lord says to His steward in one of His parables. On another occasion He speaks of the talents that He will demand back with interest (Matt. 24: 14 ff.). Again at another time, of the barren fig tree: He will wait one year longer for it to bear fruit; but if it does not do so then, He will cut it down and cast it into the fire (Luke 13: 6 ff.).

2) Aware of this responsibility, how differently I will direct my whole earthly life! I will certainly bear in mind the answer given by an English missionary to an opulent business man. The priest was invited to dine with a certain rich man.



But even during dinner the telephone bell rang repeatedly, and the host arranged several transactions.

"You see, father," he said, "here in this house, no time at all is lost."

"Time, indeed not," replied the missionary, "but Eternity, I fear."

B. If, aware of this, I want to survey the results of my stewardship, if I look to see whether the talent God entrusted to me has brought interest; if I seek the fruit on my tree of life, I wonder what the result of the accounting will be at the end of my life.

1) We are acquainted with the modern cash registers with which large stores are equipped. Each smallest payment is typed on a tape of paper. In the evening, at the pressure of a button, the total of the whole day's receipts lies before us most precisely added together.

But what is this accurate cash register compared to God's "bookkeeping," compared to the book which Holy Writ mentions when it says: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened . . . and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books according to their works" (Apoc. 20: 12). I look back upon my past life: must I not be startled when I think of the precise bookkeeping in the next world?

2) An exhibition of pictures was visited by someone who stood about in the galleries, bored and uninterested, because even the most beautiful pictures made no impression on him. When he began to complain to one of the artists how tiresome the exhibition was, the artist replied: "If only I could lend you my eyes, dear friend."

How differently we should look at an exhibition of pictures, if we could borrow an artist's eyes! And how differently we

should look at this world too, at life, at all our earthly struggles and plans, if we could borrow the eyes of a saint! Let us say the eyes of St. Aloysius; the eyes of the St. Aloysius who put this question to himself before every undertaking: "Of what use will this be to me in gaining eternity?" Or if we could borrow St. Paul's eyes, the eyes of the St. Paul who wrote: "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" (Rom. 8: 19). Or if we could borrow the eyes of the Lord Jesus Himself, the eyes of our Lord who said: "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16: 26.) This is the feeling of responsibility that comes from the thought of death.

Can we, with the valuable material placed in our hands, form such an image of our soul that God's eyes will rest with delight on its beauty? It does not depend on us whether this image shows an old man or a young boy, an aged woman or a young girl. How much time on earth God intends to give to each one, is His secret. But it depends on us and we are responsible whether the soul of the old man or young boy, the old woman or the young girl, is beautiful or not.

### III

#### DEATH WARNS US OF OUR DUTY

The knowledge of this responsibility arouses in us a sense of duty. A double duty: to show a filial gratitude to God for the love He has bestowed on us, and to make a manly decision about the future.

A. The moments in which our thoughts are occupied with death are also the moments in which to give thanks to God. Perhaps never can we say the first words of the preface at mass with so much feeling as in these moments: *Vere dignum*

*et justum est*, "It is truly meet and just, right and available to salvation, that we should always and in all places, give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty, eternal God." We give thanks for all the good that Thou hast bestowed on us in life till now, but we give thanks also for every affliction with which Thou hast visited us.

1) To give thanks for all good bestowed on us. Before all else I give thanks to God for the spiritual favors I have received during my prayers, especially during mass and through the reception of the sacraments. I give thanks for all the loving pardon granted to me after my many backslidings. For the immeasurable love that entered into my heart with the Holy Eucharist. For all the grace that aided and guided me even though I was unaware; that saved me from so many falls which I shall know about only in the next world. For all this I give humble thanks.

But then I also wish to give thanks for all material blessings bestowed on me: for health and a livelihood, for my family and my friends, for my successes, for my recovery from illness. Gratitude for favors received is dictated by our instinctive human feeling.

2) Nevertheless we must be grateful also for the suffering and trials that God has visited upon us in the course of our lives. Many people find this hard to understand.

A few years ago everybody was infected by the crossword-puzzle fever. It was a sort of intellectual epidemic. Husband and wife at the dinner table, clerks and storekeepers at their desks and behind the counter, schoolchildren of all ages—all were solving crossword puzzles. Yet for those who did not understand them, these puzzles were nothing but horizontal and vertical rows of letters and a confusion of black squares lying mixed pell-mell. For those who did not understand them. But for the initiated, behind the black lines, seeming

to run aimlessly hither and thither, an interesting and intelligible solution lay hidden.

Earthly life puts everyone face to face with difficult and often bitter crossword puzzles. If only more people understood the solution of their crossword puzzle. If only everyone possessed the necessary skill and patience. In the lives of those who do not understand it, the black lines of disaster and trial run in aimless confusion; whereas those who understand it, know that in the eyes of God every black line has its meaning and purpose.

What a pity that many do not even wish to understand this! Yet this is the truly Christian concept: to say *Te Deum* also in failure. To say *Te Deum* also in sickness. To say *Te Deum* also in poverty. It is chiefly of this that St. Paul admonishes us: "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father" (Eph. 5: 20).

B. Besides gratitude, the thought of life's brief span makes me aware of another obligation: the duty of manly decision. If everything rushes toward death, if everything sooner or later slips from our grasp—health, good looks, money, pleasure, fortune, rank, fame, everything—then henceforth our all will be, not this world, but life everlasting; the world and worldly possessions will be only means toward life eternal.

1) During his imaginary journey, when Dante arrived at the gate of Paradise, before entering he glanced back once more at the earth. "I looked back across the seven spheres," he writes. "I saw the earth: it was so small that I had to smile at sight of it. So that is the little place that often makes us so proud."

Does not the same feeling possess us when, in the last moments of a passing year, we look back at it as it prepares to sink into its grave? How the past twelve months, fifty-two

weeks, three hundred and sixty-five days shrink! Was that the year that so often made us proud, foolhardy, sinful?

For many people this earth is everything. This earth and its pleasures, its wealth, its treasures. "He who has money, has everything," they say.

Yet indeed it is not so. With money you purchase things to eat, but not an appetite. With money you can purchase medicine, but not health. You can buy soft pillows, but not quiet sleep. You can buy a beautiful house, but not a good conscience. You can buy acquaintances, but not friends. You can buy servants, but not their loyalty. And principally, with money you can buy a beautiful crypt in the cemetery for your body; but a place for your soul in life everlasting? No. A thousand times no.

Then let us be wise, dear brethren. You know the reproach that was once made to the great astronomer, Tycho Brahe, by his coachman: "Good master, you know your way about the heavens, but here on earth you are very stupid."

How many modern people would deserve this reproach, but reversed: "You know your way about the earth very well, you are quite at home here, but you are stupid with regard to heaven, you do not trouble about your eternal home and your destiny."

2) We still have time, God has left us the continuation of our lives. Do not let us waste that too. You know what St. Augustine wrote of the value of time: Moments are the seeds of eternity, he said (*semina aeternitatis*). Time is precious, for with time well used we can purchase eternity.

The years pass, flying by one after the other in rapid succession. Sad it would be if, at the end of a life that has sped by all too quickly, we should have to exclaim with Hebbel: "The man I am, sorrowfully greets the man I might have been."

In describing some ancient churches, Baedeker's guide books often remark: "It is regrettable that the frescoes were later retouched." A regrettable barbarism: to ruin a masterpiece with bungling strokes of the brush. But Christianity has imprinted such a masterpiece upon our souls: Christ's divine features. Let us be watchful that sin does not daub its vileness upon this masterpiece. If this misfortune has happened in the past, let us be the more watchful henceforth. Time is passing. We must not postpone the work of repair and restoration.

If even after our best intentioned resolves we become aware that we waver again and again, and if after another fall we again have to lift our hands in supplication for pardon, even then we must make a fresh start, a thousand times if need be. Let our consolation be the knowledge that when we appear before the omniscient God, He not only knows our faults and failings but also our many brave exertions and struggles in trying to overcome them. True, He sees our falls, but He sees also our repentance.

This earth is a vale of tears for all of us. Like an endless line of pilgrims, humanity winds its way through it, and every pilgrim—great or small, rich or poor, young or old, man or woman—every pilgrim carries his own cross upon his shoulder. Right through all the stations of life until we arrive. For the pilgrimage has an end. We shall arrive.

Now if everything in this world passes away, are we not foolish to build our lives on something so transient? In your room do you not hear time steadily sawing at your tree of life? Each tick of the clock is a movement of the saw under your feet.

Is any man so foolish as to build himself a beautiful house on quicksand, on a boggy swamp? We build with concrete,

and reinforced concrete at that. Eternity, that is reinforced concrete. Eternity, that is a foundation on which we can build confidently.

Brethren. The stream of time sweeps the ice-blocks of the years beneath us; but we have a strong support to which we can cling: our belief in eternity.

And if in the midst of such thoughts we can listen to death's warning, then at the hour of our departure the promise of the psalm will be fulfilled in us: "He that dwelleth in the aid of the most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector, and my refuge; my God, in Him will I trust (Ps. 90: 1, 2). Amen.