Meménto, homo, quia pulvis es: Remember, man, thou art dust!

Meditation for Ash Wednesday by St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

It is most useful for our salvation to say often to ourselves: I must one day die! The Church every year on Ash Wednesday brings this remembrance to the faithful: *Meménto, homo, quia pulvis es, et in púlverem revertéris*! (Genesis 3:19). "Remember, man, that thou art dust and into dust shalt thou return!"

O my God, give me light, give me strength to spend the rest of my life in serving and loving Thee.

"Remember, man, that thou art dust and into dust shalt thou return!" This certainty of death is brought to our recollection many times in the year; sometimes by the burial grounds which we pass upon the road, sometimes by the graves which we behold in churches, sometimes by the dead who are carried to burial.

The most precious furniture that was carried by the anchorites to their caves was a cross and a skull; the cross to remind them of the great love of Jesus Christ for us, and the skull to remind them of the day of their own death. And so they persevered in penitential works till the end of their days; and thus dying in poverty in the desert, they died more contented than if they had died as kings in their palaces.

"The end is at hand! The end is at hand!" *Finis venit; venit finis*. (Ezechiel 7:2). In this life one man lives a longer, another a shorter time; but for everyone sooner or later, the end comes; and when that end comes, nothing will comfort us at death but the thought that we have loved Jesus Christ, and have endured with patience the labors of this life for love of Him. Then, not the riches we have gained, nor the honors we have obtained, nor the pleasures we have enjoyed, will console us. All the greatness of the world cannot comfort a dying man; it rather adds to his pains; and the more he has gained of it, the more does he suffer. It was said by Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a very holy Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph II: "What profit is a kingdom at the hour of death?"

Oh, how many worldly persons are there to whom, at the very moment when they are busy in seeking for gain, power, and office, the message of death comes: "Set thy house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." (Isaias 37:1). Why, O man, hast thou neglected to make thy will till the hour when thou art in sickness? O my God, what pain is suffered by him who is on the point of gaining some lawsuit, or of taking possession of some palace or property, who hears it said by the priest who has come to pray for his soul: Depart, Christian soul, from this world. Depart from this world, and render thy account to Jesus Christ. "But," he cries, "I am not now well prepared." What matters that? Thou must now depart.

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O my God, give me light, give me strength to spend the rest of my life in serving and loving Thee. If now I should die, I should not die content; I should die disturbed. What, then, do I wait for? That death should seize me at a moment of the greatest peril to my soul? O Lord, if I have been foolish in the past, I will not be so for the time to come. Now I give myself wholly to Thee; receive me and help me with Thy grace.

II. In a word, to every one the end comes, and with the end comes that decisive moment on which depends a happy or wretched eternity. Oh, what a moment, on which Eternity depends! Oh, that all would think upon that moment, and the account they must give to their Judge of their whole life! "Oh, that they were wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!" (Deuteronomy 32:29). Truly, they would not then devote themselves to amassing riches, nor labor to become great in this perishable world; they would think how to become Saints, and to be great in that life which never ends.

If, then, we have Faith, let us believe that there is a Death, a Judgment, an Eternity, and labour for the rest of our life to live only for God. And, therefore, let us take care to live as pilgrims on this earth, remembering that we must speedily leave it. Let us live ever with death before our eyes; and, in all the affairs of life, let us take care to act precisely as we should act at the point of death. All things upon earth either leave us or we leave them. Let us hear Jesus Christ, Who says: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume." (Matthew 6:20). Let us despise the treasures of earth, which cannot content us, and speedily end; and let us gain those heavenly treasures which will make us happy and will never end.

Miserable I am, O Lord, in that I have so often, for the sake of the goods of this life, turned my back upon Thee Who art the Infinite Good! I see my folly in having sought for a great name, and for making my fortune in the world. I see what my true happiness is: it is henceforth to love Thee, and in everything to fulfill Thy Will.

O my Jesus, take from me the desire of gain; make me love neglect and a humble life. Give me strength to deny myself in everything that displeases Thee. Make me embrace, with a calm mind, infirmities, persecutions, desolations, and all the crosses that Thou mayst send me. Oh, that I could die for the love of Thee, abandoned by all, as Thou didst die for me!

Holy Virgin, Thy prayers can enable me to find my true happiness, which is earnestly to love Thy Son. Oh, pray for me; in Thee I put my trust.

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