

A Happy Death

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PART I.

CONFRATERNITY OF THE BONA MORS.

THE Latin words Bona Mors mean a good or happy death.

To die a good death is the greatest and most essential grace we can ask of God. For on our death depends our eternity. A happy death means a happy eternity, and the attaining of the only real purpose of our lives, to wit, the salvation of our souls; whilst on the other hand a bad death is but the passage into everlasting misery. No argument, therefore, is needed to prove the supreme importance and necessity of taking such measures now as may best secure for us the grace of dying well.

Among the means at our disposal to procure a happy death prayer holds the very foremost place. If we adopt this means and make fervent and persevering use of it through life, we shall most certainly die happy deaths, and save our souls. Hence the Confraternity of the Bona Mors has been established to unite the faithful in a great public league of prayer in common, whose object shall be to secure for each of the members the crowning and all-comprehensive grace of dying well.

Origin of the Confraternity.

The Association of the Bona Mors was founded in the year 1648 by the Servant of God, Father Vincent Caraffa; seventh General of the Society of Jesus. Father Caraffa established this first association in the Jesuit Church of the Jesu in Rome, under the title of "Congregation of Jesus Dying on the Cross, and of the Mother of Sorrows," or more simply, "Congregation of the Bona Mors."

It was the custom at this period for a large number of the faithful to assemble every Friday evening in the Church of the Jesu. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and two Jesuit Fathers in turn delivered moving addresses to the congregation, on the various scenes of our Divine Lord's Passion and Death. From these discourses, or meditations, salutary conclusions were deduced, specially adapted to prepare the members of the congregation for a happy death.

The contemplation of Christ crucified, the consideration of His sufferings, and especially of the sufferings caused by His Five Most Precious Wounds, reflection on the lessons of patience, humility, resignation, and many other virtues so eloquently preached to us by our dying Saviour from the pulpit of the Cross, afforded excellent subject-matter for meditation on the means to be adopted for the securing of a happy death. The devotions ended with prayers, offered for the grace of dying well, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Soon the new Association spread itself abroad, and was established in many of the cities and towns of Italy; and everywhere its introduction was marked by a wonderful and rapid growth of fervour in the faithful.

It received the approval of the Sovereign Pontiffs, Innocent X and Alexander VII. On the 23rd September 1729, the Association was raised to the dignity of an Arch-Confraternity by Benedict XIII, who enriched it with large and numerous Indulgences. The supreme direction of the Association was entrusted by the Pope to the Father-General of the Society of Jesus, with power to erect similar Confraternities in all churches of the Society, and aggregate them to the Arch-Confraternity at Rome.

This power was afterwards extended by Leo XII, in 1827. The Father-General was empowered to affiliate, not merely Confraternities, erected in the churches of the Society, but also such as should henceforth be erected in any church whatsoever. Thus the benefits of the Association were extended to the faithful in general in every portion of the world, subject to this one condition, that all such Confraternities should receive their Diploma of Affiliation from the Father-General of the Society of Jesus, or from the local Provincial of the Order, acting under his authority.

Object.

The object of the Congregation of the Bona Mors is, as its name implies, to secure for the members all the graces necessary for a happy death. This implies the grace to live well, and thus to make the fitting preparation of a well ordered and virtuous life which is to dispose and prepare us for a holy death. It would be presumption for those who lead a bad and sinful life to look for exceptional and efficacious graces at the hour of death.

Means.

1. The Instructions given at the meetings, whereby the members are taught, above all, the practical lesson how to prepare for a happy death and how to die well.
2. The Devotions and Prayers offered in common by the members to procure for themselves, and for each other, the grace of a happy death.
3. The special efficacy attaching to united prayer.
4. Special devotion to our Lord dying on the Cross, to His Sorrowful Mother, and to St. Joseph, patron of a happy death.
5. Prayers offered at meetings for the members of the Association who are dying.
6. Frequent reflection and meditation upon death.
7. And especially the observance of practices of piety, recommended to the Associates.

Practices.

In common:

1. Every week, or at least every month, on a fixed day, especially on a Friday or Sunday, there should be a pious exercise in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ crucified and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His most sorrowful Mother.
2. Every month on some fixed day, a Recollection in preparation for death.

3. A general Communion once a month.

4. The Spiritual Exercises once a year, as far as possible. The celebration of Mass once a month for departed Sodalists.

In addition the following practices are recommended:

1. To assist at daily Mass.

2. To examine one's conscience every night.

3. To have the Rosary said publicly in the family every evening.

4. To say daily the Our Father and the Hail Mary three times, in honour of the Three Hours' Agony, for the grace of a happy death.

5. To make the Nine First Fridays.

6. To visit the sick and dying and see that they receive the Last Sacraments in good time.

7. To practice devotion to the Blessed Virgin (especially as the Mater Dolorosa – Mother of Sorrows), and to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death.

Erection of a Confraternity.

In order to erect a Confraternity of the Bona Mors, the Parish Priest, or the Curate, with his approval, having received the approbation of the Bishop, should first procure a Diploma of Aggregation, through the Rev. Father Provincial of the Society of Jesus, whereby as Director he and his successors become entitled to receive members, and the newly-erected Confraternity is made sharer in all the privileges of the Arch-Confraternity in Rome. A Register should then be opened in which the names and addresses of the members are inscribed. It is usual, and desirable, though not absolutely necessary, that each member should receive a Certificate of Admission, signed by the Director. Public meetings of the Confraternity should be held at least once a month. Friday or Sunday is the day assigned for this purpose; the Indulgences are attached to either of these days.

N.B. — Certificates of Admission to the Confraternity of the Bona Mors may be procured, at trifling cost, from the office of the Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart, Messenger Publications 37 Lr Leeson St, Dublin 2, Ireland. Diplomas of Aggregation can be had on application to the Rev. Father Provincial, S.J., Jesuit Provincial Offices: Milltown Park, Sandford Road, Dublin 6.

Conditions of Admission.

The only absolutely necessary conditions for membership are to be received by a priest, duly authorised, and to have one's name inscribed in the local register of the Bona Mors Confraternity. Ordinarily speaking, new members must be received by the Director of the Association. However, by a rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences, dated 23rd June, 1885, the Director is empowered, where there is any reasonable motive for doing so, to delegate another priest to take his place. New members generally receive a Certificate of Admission, signed by the Director of the Confraternity, but this is not absolutely essential.

No external badge is used.

The formula of admission is:

“N (name) has been received among the Sodalists of the Sodality of our Lord Jesus Christ dying on the Cross, and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of Dolours, commonly known as the Bona Mors, herein established.”

DateYear

.....Director.

The dead and, unless under exceptional circumstances, the absent are not eligible for membership. A decree of the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences says that only “by an unusual and extraordinary exception is it allowed to enrol those absent,” and the Director is empowered to decide what constitutes a right to such an “unusual and extraordinary exception” being made. There is no fee for reception. The money necessary for procuring Certificates of Admission, and defraying other expenses, may be got by voluntary subscription on the part of the members.

Meetings.

Public meetings should be held at least once a month, on some fixed Friday or Sunday. The Indulgences are attached to either of these days. The order of devotions, which it is desirable should be adopted at these meetings, is given in Part II.

When new members are publicly received it may be done at the meeting of the Confraternity, after the instruction, when they will recite the Act of Consecration, kneeling round the Altar, and they will then receive their certificates.

Indulgences.

I. Plenary Indulgence.

1. On the day of reception, on condition of going to Confession and Communion.
2. At the hour of death, provided that having confessed and received Communion, or if this is impossible, provided that being contrite, the person pronounces with the lips, or if not, at least in his heart, the name of Jesus, or gives some sign of Contrition.
3. Once a month, on the Friday or Sunday appointed for the meeting, before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, on condition that, having gone to Confession, and received Communion in any Church, the members assist piously at the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and pray for the usual intentions (the Holy Father the Pope’s intentions).
4. Each month, on the day they have chosen for spiritual recollection and preparation for death, if after Confession and Holy Communion they devoutly visit the Blessed Sacrament and pray for the Holy Father’s intentions.
5. Once a year, on the day on which they prepare for death by a general Confession either of their whole life, or since their last General Confession if, after Confession and Holy Communion, they visit the Blessed Sacrament and pray for the Pope’s intentions.
6. On each of the following feasts, provided that, having gone to Confession, and received Communion in any Church, they pray for the usual intentions: Christmas Day, Epiphany, Easter Sunday, Ascension Thursday (or Sunday), Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, the Precious Blood (July 1st), the Purification and Presentation (February 2nd), the Annunciation; the Assumption, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin,

the Feast of St. Joseph and the Feast of St. John the Baptist, All Saints Day, and the Feasts of each of the Apostles.

7. On the Patronage of St. Joseph (third Sunday after Easter), and both Feasts of the Seven Dolours (namely September 15th and the Friday before Good Friday), to all the Associates who, having gone to Confession and Communion, piously visit any Chapel or Church, and pray there for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

8. Finally, the Associates can gain all the Indulgences of the Stations at Rome, if during the Lent, or during the remainder of the year, on the days fixed for the Stations, they piously visit the Blessed Sacrament, and then recite devoutly seven Paters (Our Fathers) and seven Aves (Hail Marys). (This grant of indulgences applies to every day of Lent and every day of Easter week.)

To gain a Plenary Indulgence they should have confessed and received Holy Communion.

The following are the days outside Lent on which the Plenary Indulgence of the Stations of Rome may be gained as above: Christmas Day, Holy Thursday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Thursday (or Sunday).

II. Partial Indulgences.

[As part of the reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council, Indulgences are now divided into two categories, Plenary and Partial. Partial Indulgences are no longer categorized into various amounts. The Church now makes general grants or indults of Indulgences either as 'Plenary' or 'Partial' and makes no further distinctions listing 'amounts' or 'days,' 'years' and so on. Catholics should remember, however that God will never be outdone in His display of Compassion and Mercy, so that knowing the Mercy that God has shown in the past encourages us to seek Mercy in the present.]

1. Seven years and seven quarantines [a quarantine is an equivalent value to a Lent-like forty-day period of canonical penance] every time the members are present at Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and pray for the Pope's intention on any Friday or Sunday; also, every time they perform an act of mortification.

2. An Indulgence of one year, every time they accompany the dead to the grave, hear Mass on week-days, visit the poor, the sick, or prisoners, examine their conscience at night, assist at such public or private devotions as are prescribed by the Arch-Confraternity in Rome, or at other pious exercises, even offices for the dead.

3. The indulgences of the Stations in Rome, on the usual conditions.

N.B.

1. All Indulgences of the Bona Mors can be applied to the Souls in Purgatory, except the Plenary Indulgence at death.

2. All Masses said for departed Sodalists have the favours of a privileged altar.

3. When Confession and Communion are conditions for an Indulgence, the Confession may be made any time within a week before Holy Communion.

PART II.

BONA MORS DEVOTIONS.

(Printed in Rome in 1672, and again approved by Father Roothaan, General of the Society of Jesus in 1841, and by Father Werntz in 1911.)

1. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed and the following prayers said: You, O Lord, will open our lips to bless Your Holy Name: cleanse our hearts from all idle, distracting thoughts, illumine our intellect and inflame our will, that we may worthily, attentively, and devoutly perform this holy exercise and merit to have our prayers heard in the sight of Your Divine Majesty. You who live and reign with God the Father, and in union with the Holy Ghost, one God for ever and ever.

THE STATIONS OF THE SACRED PASSION.

2. TO PROCURE THE GRACE OF A HAPPY DEATH.

O most sweet Jesus, praying to Your Father in the Garden, sorrowful even unto death, and sweating in Your agony of grief, have mercy on us.

Response. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, delivered by the traitor's kiss into the hands of Your enemies, seized and bound like a thief, and abandoned by Your disciples, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, declared guilty of death by the unjust verdict of the Jews, brought like a malefactor before the tribunal of Pilate, scorned and derided by impious Herod, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, stripped of Your garments, and most inhumanly scourged at the pillar, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, crowned with thorns, blindfolded, buffeted, struck with a reed, clothed in derision with a purple garment, and in many other ways scorned and reviled, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, reputed more criminal than Barabbas, the murderer, rejected by the Jews, and condemned to the ignominious death of the Cross, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, loaded with a heavy cross, and led like an innocent lamb to the place of execution, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, hanging between two thieves, derided, blasphemed, made to taste vinegar and gall, and enduring most horrible torments from the sixth to the ninth hour, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, dead upon the Cross, and wounded in Your side with a spear, in Your Holy Mother's presence, and from Whose open Wound poured forth blood and water, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, taken down from the Cross, and bathed with the tears of Your most sorrowful Mother, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

O most sweet Jesus, torn and bruised all over Your body, bearing the sacred marks of Your Five Most Precious Wounds, embalmed with spices and laid in the sepulchre, have mercy on us.

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

Versicle: He truly bore our sorrows.

Response: And He carried our grief.

Let us Pray.

O God, who, for the redemption of the world, did vouchsafe to be born, to be circumcised, to be rejected by the Jews, betrayed with a kiss, to be bound like a malefactor, and like an innocent lamb to be led to slaughter, to be ignominiously brought before Annas, Caiphas, Pilate, and Herod; to be accused by false witnesses, scourged with whips, buffeted, defiled with spittle, crowned with thorns, stripped of Your garments, fastened to the Cross, placed between two thieves, to have vinegar and gall given You to drink, to have Your side pierced through with a spear; do You, O Lord, by these most grievous pains, which I, though unworthy, commemorate, and by Your most Sacred Passion and Death, free me from the pains of hell, and conduct me whither Your mercy conducted the good thief crucified with You, who, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, live and reign for ever. Amen.

3. Recite the Beads of the Five Wounds, with the prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, God of my heart, by those Five Wounds by which You were pierced on the Cross through love for us, help Your servants whom You have redeemed by Your Precious Blood.

4. The Stabat Mater is sung, ('By her cross, her vigil keeping, Stood the Virgin Mother weeping,') concluding with the versicle, response, and prayer:

V. Tuam ipsius animam doloris gladius pertransivit.

R. Ut revelentur ex multis cordibus cogitationes.

(V. Your own soul has the sword of sorrow pierced through.

R. So that it might be revealed what were, out of many hearts, their very thoughts.)

Oremus.

(Let us Pray.)

Interveni pro nobis, quaesumus, Domine Iesu Christe, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae apud Tuam clementiam Beata Virgo Maria, Mater Tua, cuius sacratissimam animam in hora tuae Passionis doloris gladius pertransivit. Per Te Iesu Christe, Salvator mundi, qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivis et regnas in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

(Intervene for us, we beseech You, Lord Jesus Christ, now and at the hour of our death, that You would show Your clemency, in the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Your Mother, whose most holy soul was pierced through by a sword of sorrow in Your hour of Suffering at the Passion. We

ask this through You, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns in a world without end, in the world of worlds, for ever and ever. Amen.)

5. An Instruction.

6. The Tantum Ergo is sung (“Down in adoration falling” “Let us adore So Great a Sacrament Now”), with versicle, response, and the prayer of the Blessed Sacrament followed by the two prayers:

Domine Iesu Christe, qui hora sexta pro redemptione mundi Crucis patibulum ascendisti, et Sanguinem Tuum pretiosum in remissionem peccatorum nostrorum fudisti, Te humiliter deprecamur ut post obitum nostrum Paradisi ianuas nos gaudenter introire concedas.

(Lord Jesus Christ, who, at the sixth hour, for the redemption of the world, did ascend the ignominious gibbet of the Cross, and did shed Your precious Blood for the remission of our sins, we humbly beg You that after our death we may rejoice as You concede to open the gates of Paradise to us.)

Quaesumus clementiam Tuam, ut famulos Tuos gratia Tua confirmare digneris, ut in hora mortis eorum non praevaleret contra eos adversarius, sed cum Angelis Tuis transitum habere mereantur ad vitam. Qui vivis et regnas Deus in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

(We beseech You of Your Clemency, that You would vouchsafe to confirm Your grace to all Your family and servants that in the hour of their death they would not be overcome by the adversary, but with Your Angels would merit to be transferred to eternal life. We ask this of You Who live and reign as God in a world without end, in the world of worlds, for ever and ever. Amen)

OTHER PRAYERS WHICH MAY BE SAID IN PRIVATE.

Act of Contrition.

My dear Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world! Behold prostrate at Your Feet the most unhappy and most ungrateful creature on the face of the earth. My God, I have offended You most grievously in thought, word, and deed. My heinous crimes affixed You to the cruel Cross. To rescue me from eternal damnation You did suffer Your three hours’ agony on Mount Calvary. But oh, how much am I displeased with myself! How I grieve for having offended You! God of infinite goodness, of infinite charity! I stand astonished and confounded at Your incomprehensible patience in supporting the most provoking wretch that breathes. From the very bottom of my heart, I detest all my sins; and because I love You, and will ever love You, above all things created, I steadfastly purpose, by Your holy grace, never to offend You any more, and to die a thousand deaths rather than commit one mortal sin. Amen.

Act of Consecration.

(Which should also be recited by the members of the Bona Mors Confraternity individually, on the day of their reception.)

O Jesus, crucified and dying on the Cross for the sins of the world, I ----- though a most unworthy sinner, and the guilty cause of Your bitter Passion and Death, am moved by the desire of becoming more pleasing to You, and of obtaining the grace of a holy death. Wherefore, in the presence of the whole heavenly court, I consecrate myself entirely to You, in remembrance of Your most precious death on the Cross, and of the sorrows of Your Most Blessed Mother. I firmly purpose to attend the

meetings of this Confraternity, to observe all its Rules and Customs, and to procure, by every means in my power, an increase in its numbers, and the maintenance of this devotion of the Bona Mors in its fervour throughout the world.

Therefore, I beseech You, O most merciful Redeemer, through Your most painful Death, and Your most precious Blood, through the sufferings and grief of Your most sorrowful Mother, to admit me within Your Sacred Wounds. Accept this, my offering, and place me among the number of Your servants and perpetual adorers.

O Jesus, help me; O Mary, assist me in all my thoughts, words, and actions, during my whole life, that I may deserve to expire in your most loving embrace. Oh, forsake me not at the hour of my death. Amen.

Devotions of the Five Wounds.

FOR THE GRACE OF A HAPPY DEATH.

Let, us adore the Five Most Sacred Wounds of Christ, our Lord, and each one in particular, with a most assured confidence in His Passion and Death, which He offered for us to His Eternal Father, and with a firm hope that by the communication of His merits, and the assistance of His grace, we may obtain remission of our sins, the grace of a happy and a holy death, and everlasting life. Grant to us, O Lord, a deep sense of grief for our offences and ingratitude; and a firm purpose for the future of avoiding sin. Let us also condole with the most holy Mother of Christ, whose soul, as she stood beneath the Cross of her beloved Son, was wounded with a sword of bitter grief.

I. TO THE WOUND OF THE LEFT FOOT.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly adore the most Sacred Wound of Your left Foot. I thank You for the cruel pain You did endure for me, with so much love and charity.

I compassionate You in Your torments, and I condole with Your afflicted Mother in her grief. I humbly beg pardon for all my sins, which I desire to grieve for more than for any imaginable evil, because they offend You, O infinite Goodness. Vouchsafe to convert all sinners, and to make them understand the enormity of mortal sin.

Versicle: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, graciously hear us.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, etc.

Those Wounds which now the stars outshine,

Those furnaces of love divine,

May they our dross-stained souls refine.

II. TO THE WOUND OF THE RIGHT FOOT.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly adore the Sacred Wound of Your right Foot. I give You thanks for the cruel pain You did endure for me with so much love and charity.

I compassionate You in Your torments, and I condole with Your most afflicted Mother in her grief. I beg that You will grant me strength against all temptations, and prompt obedience in the execution of Your Divine Will.

Versicle: Jesus, hear us.

R. Jesus, graciously hear us.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, etc.

Those Wounds which now the stars outshine,

Those furnaces of love divine,

May they our dross-stained souls refine.

III. TO THE WOUND OF THE LEFT HAND.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly adore the most Sacred Wound of Your left Hand. I thank You for the cruel pain You did endure for me, with so much love and charity.

I compassionate You in Your torments, and I condole with Your afflicted Mother in her grief. By Your Five Most Precious Wounds, I beg of You to deliver me from the pains of hell, and to grant me patience and conformity to Your most Holy Will. Pardon all my enemies, and those who bear me any ill-will. Grant patience to the sick, O Lord, restore them to health, and support, by the assistance of Your grace, all such as are now in their last agony, that they may not perish eternally.

V. Jesus, hear us.

R. Jesus, graciously hear us.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, etc.

Those Wounds which now the stars outshine,

Those furnaces of love divine,

May they our dross-stained souls refine.

IV. TO THE WOUND OF THE RIGHT HAND.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly adore the most Sacred Wound of Your right Hand. I thank You for the cruel pain which You did endure for me with so much love and charity.

I compassionate You in Your torments, and I condole with Your afflicted Mother in her grief. I beg of You to grant me a firm and resolute will in working out my salvation. Give me the grace of final perseverance, and bring me to the enjoyment of that glory which was purchased for me by Your Precious Blood. Grant also, O Jesus, speedy relief to the suffering souls in Purgatory; enable Your servants to make daily progress in perfection, and especially those who are members of this Confraternity.

V. Jesus, hear us.

R. Jesus, graciously hear us.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, etc.

Those Wounds which now the stars outshine,

Those furnaces of love divine,

May they our dross-stained souls refine.

V. TO THE WOUND OF THE SACRED SIDE.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I most humbly adore the most Sacred Wound in Your Blessed Side, and I thank You for the immense love You did manifest towards us in the opening of Your Sacred Heart.

I condole with Your dear Mother in her bitter sorrow. Grant me pure and perfect charity, that loving You above all things, and all things in You, I may, by the assistance of Your grace, breathe forth my soul in sentiments of the most tender love. I humbly beg of You, sweet Jesus, to protect the Holy Catholic Church, to watch over and direct Your Vicar upon earth, to strengthen and support all persons, secular and religious, who are instrumental in bringing souls to You. Preserve in Your happy service all Christian kings, rulers and princes. Bring back into the way of salvation those who, through malice or ignorance, have wandered from the one true Fold, and bring beneath Your sacred yolk all infidels, heretics, and such as are still strangers to the sweetness of Your gentle sway.

V. Jesus, hear us.

R. Jesus, graciously hear us

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father, etc.

Those Wounds which now the stars outshine,

Those furnaces of love divine,

May they our dross-stained souls refine.

Let us Pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, You God of my heart, by those Five Precious Wounds, which Your love for us inflicted on You, on the Cross, help Your servants, whom You have redeemed by Your most Precious Blood.

Most merciful Redeemer, I beseech You, by the bitter torments You were pleased to suffer for one so every way contemptible as I am, when Your soul was separated from Your Blessed Body, receive my soul upon its parting from the body, and comfort me as of old You did give comfort to the dying thief with those consoling words:

“This day shall you be with me in Paradise.” Amen.

FURTHER PRAYERS FOR A HAPPY DEATH.

V. Incline unto my aid, O Lord God!

R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Open our mouths, O Lord, to bless Your holy Name; cleanse our hearts from all vain and distracting thoughts; enlighten our understandings; inflame our wills, that we may worthily perform this holy exercise with attention and devotion, and may deserve to be heard in the presence of Your Divine Majesty; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ! Saviour of the world, prostrate at Your Sacred Feet, we detest our sins of thought, word and deed. We love You, and will continue to love You above all created things, hence

we firmly purpose by the help of Your grace never to offend You, and to die rather than commit one mortal sin.

O Lord Jesus Christ! We adore the sacred wound in Your Blessed Side. We thank You for the infinite love shown us at the opening of Your Sacred Heart. Grant us pure and perfect charity, that loving You above all things; we may breathe our last in the purest sentiments of Divine Love.

Protect Your Holy Catholic Church, direct Your governing Vicar upon earth, and all Ecclesiastical Orders, and all pious persons instrumental in the conversion of souls.

Preserve in Your holy service all Christian kings, rulers and princes. Bring back to the way of salvation all those that have gone astray, whether through malice or ignorance, and bring under Your sweet yoke all infidels, heretics, and other enemies of Your Holy Name.

Let us say the Our Father and Hail Mary three times in memory of the Three Hours' Agony of our Divine Lord upon the cross for the souls of the faithful departed of this congregation.

Pater (Our Father), Ave (Hail Mary).

Let us say Our Father and Hail Mary once for the happy death of the member of this congregation that is to die next. Pater (Our Father), Ave (Hail Mary).

O Merciful Redeemer and God of infinite patience! Great is our confusion when we appear in Your Divine Presence. We abhor all our sins of thought, word, and deed, not merely for the fear of punishment or for the hope of reward, but principally for Your sake, and because You do infinitely detest them.

O God of Majesty and Mercy! Look upon the sacred marks in Your hands, feet, and side, which You do still retain in Your glorified Body, that they may plead in our behalf. Strengthen our weakness, confirm our resolution of never more offending You. We prefer to lose everything, even life itself, rather than lose Your favour by mortal sin.

O Saviour of perishing mankind! who opens Your hand and fills every creature with benediction, bless us all as You did bless Your beloved Disciples when ascending in triumph from the Mountain of Olives, that we may live and die in these happy dispositions. Amen.

Let us Pray.

O God! Who has doomed all men to die, but has concealed from all the hour of their death, grant that I may pass my days in the practice of virtue and justice, and that I may be made worthy to quit this world in the peace of a good conscience, and in the embrace of Your love; through Christ our Lord. Amen

PART III.

MEDITATIONS FOR THE BONA MORS.

First Meditation on Death.

1st Prelude.

Imagine yourself as a criminal about to suffer death for your misdeeds at the hands of the public executioners.

2nd Prelude.

Beg grace to know the enormity of sin and to detest it with your whole heart.

1ST POINT. — DEATH, A SEVERE AND UNIVERSAL CHASTISEMENT.

It was not part of God's original intention with respect to man that our career on earth should end in death. Death is the direct result of sin. And what a terrible punishment it is! Fancy to yourself a just and wise sovereign who should summon the judges of the land into his presence, and, placing in their hands a list of all the nobility and chief men of the kingdom, should order them to pronounce sentence of death upon these persons. You would say these nobles had been guilty of some very dreadful crime, or else that the sovereign had acted unjustly, or with undue severity.

This sovereign is God and He has decreed the death, not of a portion only of His subjects, but of every member of the human race without a solitary exception. We cannot, for an instant, suppose Him capable of acting unjustly or with too great severity, and the only conclusion we can draw is that sin, which has brought this dreadful chastisement upon us, is an evil terrible beyond all human comprehension.

So absolutely universal is the operation of this terrible decree of death that no one ever has escaped from it, or ever will. It is true that the prophet Elias (Elijah) was withdrawn from this world without passing through the gates of death, but many Scripture scholars maintain that he will come again upon the earth and die like every other man. One might well have supposed that Christ, the Son of God, and His most Blessed Mother Mary, would be exempted from the common lot of death. Yet not even in favour of the Redeemer did God make any exception to the universal law that all shall die

Application.

At the sight of such a severe and universal chastisement inflicted on the human race for sin, we cannot but be penetrated with a very deep and lasting dread and hatred of this fearful evil, and be urged to deep contrition for our past offences and a resolution to fight and pray with all our might against a repetition of them in the future. Sin is the one and only thing we shall have to fear when death summons us before the throne of God. No loss or gain of any earthly good will matter to us then. Whether we were rich or poor, had a life of honour or humiliation, or of joy or sorrow, nothing will at all concern us upon our bed of death but this, that we have served God and striven to avoid offending Him.

Affections and Resolutions.

Open my eyes, O Lord, that I may never sleep in death that the enemy may not say: "I have prevailed against him." Enable me, O Lord, to understand now how great an evil sin is, and grant me efficacious grace to keep myself outside its baneful influence in life, that I may not be afraid to stand before You after death.

2ND POINT. — DEATH, A ROBBER THAT WILL DEPRIVE ME OF ALL THINGS.

Death is a robber that will come, perhaps, when we least expect him, to deprive us of all we possess, and send us forth to meet our Judge, with nothing to accompany us but our good and evil deeds.

Reflect for a moment how completely and irrevocably death will cut you off from everything you love and value here on earth. The home in which you have dwelt, the relatives and friends you loved, the objects that surrounded you in life and occupied so much of your attention, the interests,

cares, and occupations in which you were so much engrossed and that seemed to you so urgent and of such importance while you lived, the money or the property that perhaps you laboured so assiduously to acquire and that you treasured up so carefully and were so much afraid of losing — all this you must abandon absolutely and without reserve, and leave it all behind you, never to resume possession of it.

Application.

And yet how much we value all these things and cling to them, and struggle often for a life-time to add, in some degree, to our possession of them. And sometimes, even, we are willing to commit sin, and put ourselves in danger of damnation for sake of some small gain, or rather than suffer some trifling loss of temporal goods, which, taken all together, cannot for an instant be compared in value with the smallest of God's graces, or with the very least of the rewards that await us in eternity.

Affections and Resolutions.

O my God, detach my heart and its affections now from all the perishable things of this world. Help me thus to merit the reward promised to the poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Grant that I may never place the interests of my soul in danger for sake of an earthly gain, for "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his own soul?"

Spiritual Reading.

"Imitation of Christ," Book I, Chapter 23.

Second Meditation on Death.

1st Prelude. — Fancy yourself lying on your bed of death.

2nd Prelude. — Ask the grace to die a happy death.

1ST POINT. — CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH.

1st Circumstance.

I may die at any moment. The criminal condemned to execution knows the day and hour of his death. In this respect he is better off than I am for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come" (Luke 12:40) like a "thief" in the night to demand your soul of you.

2nd Circumstance.

I may die in any place, at home or abroad, on sea or on land. If I walk in the public streets I may suddenly be carried off by any of the accidents of which I read so often in the newspapers; if I cross the seas I may be shipwrecked in a storm; if I travel in the train, an aeroplane, or in the tramcar a sudden mishap may send me without a moment's preparation to eternity. In no place am I safe from death.

3rd Circumstance.

I may die from any cause.

(1) From any one of the innumerable kinds of sickness that are daily carrying off so many people round me. A cold, an attack of influenza, a fever, congestion of the lungs, or cancer or heart disease may be the immediate cause of my death.

(2) Or I may become the victim of an accident that may in any place or moment stretch me senseless on my bed of death.

4th Circumstance.

I may die an easy or a painful death. Some die calmly and without a struggle, or in sleep, or unconsciousness, or else so suddenly that there is no time for suffering; others, on the contrary, have a long and painful illness or they die after many hours' agony. Which of these two kinds of death it may be my lot to have, I know not.

Application.

Since everything connected with my death is so uncertain — the time, place, and cause, the other circumstances — it behooves me to be always ready. I can never say with certainty when rising in the morning that I shall live till night; when retiring to rest I have no certainty that I shall ever wake again to consciousness. The one and only means I can adopt to secure a happy death is to be always in the grace of God, and ever ready to give up my soul into His Hands.

Affections and Resolutions.

My God, grant me grace so to live that I may always be ready to meet death. Help me to avoid most carefully whatever is offensive to You; to live from day to day a life of exactness and fervour in Your service; to be always faithful to my prayers and to the Sacraments, and to make my life a preparation for a happy and a holy death.

2ND POINT. — I CAN ONLY DIE ONCE.

The fact that we can die but once adds greatly to the necessity of making careful preparations for our death, when-ever it may come. "It is decreed for all men once to die (Hebr. 9:27). If we could die a second time it would not matter so very much how we succeeded on the first occasion. But having only one chance, and our eternity depending on that chance, no precaution that we take can be too great. If we die well all will be well with us for eternity, if we die badly we shall be forever miserable.

If we die well it matters little that we have had much to suffer in this world; that we have possessed, perhaps, but little of this world's goods, that we have been held in small repute, and failed to make a name or to amass a fortune for ourselves on earth.

And on the other hand, if we die a bad death it will avail us nothing that during the brief period of our sojourn on earth we enjoyed the praise and esteem of men, and had abundance of the good things of this world.

Application.

St. Augustine says: "Qualis vita, finis ita," "As I live so shall I die." Our entire life ought therefore to be a preparation for death. By becoming members of the Bona Mors Confraternity, and being faithful to the exercises it prescribes, we adopt an excellent means of securing a happy death. A glance at the beginning of this book will amply prove the truth of' this assertion.

If my angel guardian were to make known to me that I should die before this month was ended, what measures would I take that death might not find me unprepared?

Doubtless I would put my conscience in order, and devote the few remaining days of my life to the great work of preparing for the judgment. Do this now and “be always prepared,” for we, none of us, “know the day nor the hour” of our visitation. Thus, and thus alone, can we secure that death will find us always ready.

Affections and Resolutions.

My dear Jesus, dying on the Cross, help me to keep before me at all times the hour of my death. Grant me grace to make every day and every hour of my life a preparation for it. Enable me to keep my soul unsullied by the stain of mortal sin; and should I ever have the supreme misfortune to offend You grievously grant me grace at once to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. May my life be one of prayer, sanctified by good works, and strengthened by the frequent reception of the Sacraments. Thus striving faithfully to serve You and trusting in Your boundless goodness and in the protection of Your Blessed Mother, I will go forward full of confidence and faith to receive from Your hand the death, whenever it shall come, that You have destined for me.

Third Meditation on Death.

1st Prelude.

Behold yourself lying on your death-bed, and ask. — Grace to realise the circumstances of your death.

APPLICATION OF THE SENSES.

Sight.

Behold

- (1) Your room faintly lighted by a lamp that burns low, or by the departing rays of the evening sun; your bed which you will never leave except to be carried to the grave; the various objects that surround you.
- (2) The persons who will be about you; your family and friends weeping, the attendants kneeling at a distance, the priest whispering short prayers into your ear.
- (3) Yourself stretched on your bed of pain, gradually losing the possession of your faculties, and struggling with death.
- (4) The devils using all their efforts to secure your soul; your angel guardian helping you with holy inspirations.

Taste.

Imagine the bitterness of death.

In the past, the bitter recollection of your many sins and infidelities to God, graces neglected, opportunities of doing good let slip.

In the present, the bitterness of leaving everything you love behind you — friends, possessions, home, your own body even; the sadness, weariness, dejection and prostration that accompany the last few hours of life.

In the future, the bitterness of going forth alone, unfriended, powerless, into that new land of mystery that awaits you beyond the grave, the thoughts and fears of judgment and of purgatory that are drawing, now, so near.

Hearing.

Listen to the clock as it goes tick tick, tick tick, tick tick, breaking weirdly on the silence that prevails around, this may be among the last sounds that fall upon your dying ear. Listen to your slow and laboured breathing; and the death-rattle in your throat; hear the stifled sobs of anguish from your friends that kneel around your bed; listen to the priest as he recites the prayers for the dying:

“From an evil death, O Lord, deliver him; from the pains of hell, O Lord, deliver him; from the power of Satan, O Lord, deliver him.”

“Go forth, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Who created you, of God the Son Who redeemed you, of God the Holy Ghost Who sanctified you.”

Now and then he whispers short aspirations into your dying ear:

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph assist me in my last agony”;

“Sweet Heart of Mary be you my salvation”;

“Into Your Hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.”

Make yourself familiar now with such aspirations as these, that they may readily occur to you upon your death-bed.

Touch.

Imagine how cold and clammy your body is becoming. The cold sweat of death is breaking out over it; your feet are growing numb, your arms stiffening. Your chest labours and heaves painfully with the effort to breathe. The beatings of your heart are getting gradually slower and fainter. Your eyes are becoming fixed into a glassy stare. Your breathing is growing every moment slower and more painful. The end is approaching. All is silence. Your friends whisper: “He is going fast.” You seem to be a little quieter now — the breathing is scarcely perceptible — there is scarcely any sign of motion about the heart. Lord Jesus, receive his soul! Help and console him at this supreme moment. A few minutes’ silence, then a sort of convulsive gulp and — all is over.

Pause. Reflect. Pray. Resolve.

Fourth Meditation on Death.

1st Prelude.

Behold yourself laid out after death; the room darkened; candles burning; flowers strewn around; friends coming in to see the corpse.

2nd Prelude.

Grace to prepare now for your death.

APPLICATION OF THE SENSES — (Continued).

I.

A few moments after your death.

Those around your bed are not as yet quite certain whether you are dead or not. They hold a looking glass before your mouth, but there is no sign of breath upon it. Your pulse gives no indication. Your heart has ceased beating. Your feet and hands are getting icy cold. "Yes," they whisper, "he is dead." The voice of the priest breaks in upon the silence. "De profundis clamavi ad Te Domine: Domine ezaudi vocem meam." ("Out of the depths I cried unto You, O Lord: Lord be attentive to my voice") Gently they close the eyelids, the hands are brought together and joined in the attitude of prayer, and a crucifix is placed between them. The mouth has begun to gape, they tie a handkerchief around the head to keep it shut until the body shall have grown quite cold and stiff. They write a notice for the newspapers, announcing that on such a day you died, and that the funeral will take place on such a day, at such an hour.

II.

The day of the funeral.

Attend your own funeral. Take one long, last look into the coffin ere the lid is placed upon it. How calm, and white, and motionless you lie! Some one puts his hand upon your forehead, it is cold as marble. The hearse has come; carriages are beginning to assemble at the door, and the hall and rooms below are full of people waiting for the funeral to start, and talking in an undertone together. Amid the tears and sobs of your friends the lid is put on, and quickly and silently screwed down, and then on strong men's shoulders you are carried down the narrow staircase, and out into the street, and put into the hearse, and the funeral sets out for your last resting-place.

III.

The Burial.

And now you have arrived at the cemetery. Look at the scene of your own burial. They bear you to the grave. Look in and see how deep it is. With ropes they let you down till the coffin rests upon the bottom. Some prayers are said. Listen now to the noise of the clay as they shovel it in. It falls with a heavy thud upon the coffin. The hole is filled at last. The De Profundis is repeated ('Out of the Depths I cried'), and the crowd that stand around your grave disperse for the ordinary occupations of the day, laughing and talking together as they walk down the pathway to the graveyard gate. Your body is left alone, buried in its narrow case, with seven feet of earth above it!

IV.

Some months after your death.

The world and your friends have almost forgotten all about you. Your name is seldom or never heard, and everything goes on as though you had never lived on earth at all. Pay a visit to your own grave. A stone monument has been erected over it, on which your name and age have been engraved. The grass is beginning to grow green upon the grave, and some few flowers are in bloom upon it. Now take a glance into the coffin underneath. The body is half eaten away. Great worms and maggots are crawling in and out of your mouth, and, through the sockets of your eyes. The limbs are falling asunder. An intolerable stench issues from the corrupted flesh — from that body that you took such care of during life, and whose evil inclinations you, perhaps indulged, even at the cost of sin.

Or look into that coffin after a few years have passed away. There is nothing in it now but bones — bare bones, a skull, the spinal-column with the ribs adhering, and the two long thin bones that once were legs. And look again a little later: there is nothing now but dust and powder — the last remains of what was once a human being: Oh, “vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, except to love God, and to serve Him alone.”

Pause. Reflect. Pray. Resolve.

Appendix I.

A PLENARY INDULGENCE AT THE HOUR OF DEATH.

By a Decree of the Congregation of Indulgences of March 9, 1904, His Holiness Pope [Saint] Pius X has granted a Plenary Indulgence at the moment of death to all the faithful who, on any day they may choose, will receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, and make the following Act for the love of God

“Domine Deus meus, jam nunc quodcumque morlis genus, prout Tibi placuerit, cum omnibus suis angoribus, punis ac doloribus de manu tua cequo ac libenti animo suscipio.”

“My Lord God, even now resignedly and willingly, I accept at Your hand with all its anxieties, pains, and sufferings, whatever kind of death it shall please You to be mine.”

By means of this Indulgence it becomes easy for the faithful to secure the great blessing of a Plenary Indulgence at death, while they are still in good health. There is no other condition required save those mentioned. These conditions may be carried out on any day that is convenient, but the Indulgence is not gained until the moment of death. As in the case of the Indulgence attached to the Papal blessing for the time of death, the Indulgence is not lost if one has the misfortune to fall into mortal sin after the fulfilling of the conditions. All that is necessary is that we should be in the state of grace at the time of death.

Appendix II.

PRAYERS FOR DYING SINNERS.

There is no more excellent devotion than that which takes the form of prayer for sinners in their last agony. Every moment many such are passing into eternity. Prayers such as those below, said from the heart, may rescue a poor soul at the very last moment, as it trembles on the brink of hell. What a happiness were we able to secure the salvation of even one poor dying sinner everyday! What an array of saved souls would be found waiting to help us at the hour of our own death, and to bid us welcome when we ourselves have crossed the bar

(1)

PRAYER FOR THE AGONISING.

O most merciful Jesus, lover of souls, I conjure You, by the agony of Your most Sacred Heart, and by the Dolours of Your Immaculate Mother, cleanse in Your Blood the sinners of the whole world who are in their agony, and are this day to die. Amen. [Remembering what was said above about the new regulations about Indulgences, the following are now all termed ‘Partial Indulgences’.]

Agonizing Heart of Jesus, have mercy on the dying.

— 100 days’ Indulgence (Pius IX, February 2, 1850).

(2)

All the faithful who, while assisting at Mass, “piously recommend to God the sinners of the whole world, then in their agony, and destined to die that same day,” may gain an Indulgence of 100 days (Pius X, October 26, 1907).

(3)

OFFERING OF ALL MASSES.

My God, I offer You all the Masses which are celebrated today in the whole world, for sinners who are in their agony and are to die today.

May the Precious Blood of Jesus, our Redeemer, obtain for them mercy.

— Indulgence of 300 days (Pius X, October 26, 1907).

Appendix III.

PRAYER TO ST. JOSEPH FOR A HAPPY DEATH.

O glorious St. Joseph! faithful follower of Jesus Christ, to you do we raise our hearts and hands to implore your powerful intercession in obtaining from the benign Hearts of Jesus all the helps and graces necessary for our spiritual and temporal welfare, particularly the grace of a happy death and the special favour we now implore [mention it].

Glorious St. Joseph, we feel animated with confidence that your prayers in our behalf will be graciously heard before the throne of God.

[Then say the following Versicle and Response seven times in honour of the seven joys and seven sorrows of St. Joseph.]

V. O Glorious St. Joseph, through the love you bear to Jesus Christ and for the glory of His name.

R. Hear our prayers and obtain our petitions.
