

On Entering Eternity

By A Priest.

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Death is a revealing of God, in fact that is by far the greatest happening in death.

How often do we look that far ahead, or consider seriously, what we have to expect in death. We take it for granted, at least generally, but rarely think of it. Yet it opens a way of life that lasts forever. Life here will soon end for all of us, as we read daily in the death notices, or see at a funeral as the remains of someone we know is lying there lifeless and cold.

That body must soon be buried, because decay sets in, so short is its life. If the grave were opened again sometime later, we would find little left of that body which received so much attention in life, where its needs and desires, and its many pleasures and comforts were so sought after. So often are these fleshly desires our goal; too often even at the cost of the life of God in us, sin is committed and this most important life of all is destroyed.

Repeatedly we endanger that divine life, and even drive it away in sin, seeking rather the goods of this body, which will soon die and rot in the grave, instead of those of the soul, which will live forever.

GRIM REALITY OF JUDGMENT OF GOD.

The grim reality of judgment by God, with its eternal consequences of Heaven or Hell is seldom faced and little prepared for. The world is so fleeting, so temporal, and so unable to satisfy our true needs.

The greatest goods it has to offer are only a weak reflection of eternal goods in Heaven. Earthly goods come from Him Who is infinite Good. If there is any good on earth, it can only come from Him Who made it good; and then He must be infinitely more good. What fools then men must be to forget about Him Who created all goods: What fools men must be to spend a lifetime here seeking more and more of these limited goods and rarely thinking about, much less seeking properly, the goods which last forever.

WHAT HAPPENS IN DEATH?

"He remembers that we are but flesh, a breath that goes out and does not return" (Psalm 78:39 in the Hebrew or Psalm 77:39 in the Vulgate). But what happens in death? What of this 'unknown' beyond us? Of course, we know that this body stops functioning and rots away not long after. All signs of life cease immediately, breathing stops and the organs of the body stop their work. This is the obvious part; everyone sees.

But is that all there is? What happens to the rest of human nature, that which is not so obvious to onlookers? While the body rots in the grave as any animal, what happens to the rest? Man can do things which an animal cannot do, such as reasoning, speaking, writing, expressing ideas, spiritual actions; therefore he must be more than a mere animal. There must be in man something at least as

spiritual as these spiritual actions mentioned. With the body only, we are merely animal with only animal powers. The great many works of music, architecture, philosophy, literature and the many intricate works of man, all these could then never be. Then too, there could never be a life after death, for all life would cease at death.

THE SOUL.

But we know there is a soul from constant experience with it, as well as by divine revelation, and, that it is spiritual, so its life goes on after the body dies. This reality, which we do know by experience, as well as from divine revelation, is called the soul. What happens to the soul in death? Since it is spiritual, it does not die as animals, which are material, die, or as the body dies, but the soul lives on; in fact, normal death does not affect the soul at all. Our mind and will are both spiritual, and they are of the soul, as are their actions.

So our consciousness with all that we are and have learned, remains; our free will with its choosing, its loves and its hates, also lives on; the personality, which was ours in life, lives on with its attitudes and inclinations. So, by far the most important part of our being is not affected by death, but remains as it was. Things which are of the body, die with it, as do our appetites, our passions and sensations. But our soul lives on and what is far more important (since the soul is far more important), it lives forever.

DEATH: SEPARATION OF BODY AND SOUL.

Death then is a separation of body and soul leading to the destruction of the body. The soul loses its usual means of expression and its normal tool for learning, that is, its bodily senses and powers. But that which we had learned and experienced before, remains ours, and what we had done before is done for all time and remains on our record. Our consciousness becomes far more clear. Almighty God supplies for the lack of that most useful tool, the body, and we continue without it, more active than before.

The life of the soul goes on without any interruption. The general behavior and attitudes, loves and hates, that we have acquired and practiced before, remain ours and we will face our divine Judge with all that on our record, with our deeds, with all that we have made ourselves to be by our own free choice.

If we have practiced hatred towards our fellow men, that evil remains ours. If we have had habits of sloth, especially in practices of Faith, that same laziness and indifference will remain. If we have regularly filled our minds and imaginations with lustful thoughts, our minds and wills remain locked in that evil. If we have filled our lives with constant seeking after material goods and amassing more wealth, that evil love and false 'god' will still be our great all-possessing goal in eternity.

So it will be with every virtue and vice, every good and evil of life here. That which we have made our lives to be, while we were here on earth, united in soul and body, will remain after death, in our souls, part of our being, and with this, we will have to face our divine and infinite Judge. By our earthly loves, by our decisions, we make ourselves what we finally end up to be. That which we love, forms us, or again, we become that which we love, as we work and sacrifice for it. But God loves us and has sacrificed much for us and even brings us into existence out of love for us, and for the plans and goals which He has for us. How have we loved Him?? Let us love Him!!

DEATH BRINGS US TO TRUTH.

So death brings us the very moment of truth, the terrible meeting with our Creator, with Our Judge, Our God, the infinite Good, the Author of all Truth. Death brings us to Truth. Suddenly the earth, which seemed so solid and sure, which preoccupied so much of our time and attention before, literally fades away before true reality. All at once, we see through and beyond this world of material, as though curtains were being drawn back. It then becomes so unimportant to us; all of its worries, fears, needs, hopes and plans do not matter anymore. Suddenly we see this world for what it really is, a mere veil standing before the great reality, a curtain in front of true life and Being. Everything here, at best, is only a vague shadow and imitation of that true life with God and of Heaven. The brightest lights here, are dim by comparison with this divine light.

There is really a wonderful, beautiful light waiting for us just beyond the darkness of this world, like nothing on this earth. "There was a man, one sent from God, whose name was John. This man came as a witness, to bear witness concerning the light, that all might believe through him. He was not himself the light, but was to bear witness to the light. It was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world" (John 1: 6-9). This light is not a mere figure of speech, but a really wonderful, unearthly, light which is very bright and filled with all delights. So as our bodily eyes and the rest of our bodily senses grow weak and cease to function, and when everything is ending, or so it appears to onlookers, a great new light and a new awareness of true reality overwhelms one.

THE FIRST STEP.

This is the first step only, and it is an awakening to a whole new world of great wonders, all of which were hidden from us before. Here we will know directly and immediately, without words and languages. This light is so beautiful, it can only be described as the light of glory. The wonders of this supernatural light, and life with it, then begin to come over us; a life in this glory that is far, far greater than all that ever was here on earth. Now the actual poverty, the darkness, the weakness, and the foolishness of all this world has to offer, is obvious. There is a great new opening up of brilliant light, a wonder that far surpasses all we ever dreamed of, as the splendor of God's presence begins to appear. All at once we see, with eyes of our mind, and we see an unbelievable new world that is so great we are lost in wonder, and already it brings tears of joy of our bodily eyes, even in the state of near death, as we learn from those who experience it. "The splendor of God will be as light" (Roman Breviary).

Then we see another great marvel, far greater yet, and it is that God has been very near all the time, at arm's length, so to speak, right before us all through life, so near it would seem we could have reached out and touched Him; so near that He certainly was with us all the while on earth, observing our actions, passing judgment on them, and awaiting patiently for our love and service. All the while, He was holding out His supporting hands to us, waiting for us to take them. And this is only the beginning of our introduction to the divine presence: only the beginning of our true awareness of God and eternity.

SECOND STEP BEGINS.

Then the second step begins, and with it, a very serious problem appears. The modern mind would like to believe every man will immediately enter into glory; but what really happens? The great moment and confrontation of our life is at hand. All we are and have made ourselves to be by our own free choice is how we stand before Him Who contains all wonders. He gave us freedom to choose, to act as we wanted, even helped us with His graces, so we are totally responsible for what

we have become. The divine justice is absolute, perfect and infinite and the time for judgment has come. So, as we are, we come before such a terrible Judge, and into His presence with all His divine perfections and wonders of every imaginable kind, and many which we never even dreamed of, in the splendor of His presence which is so brilliant, so pure and beautiful.

But coming into this wonder is a terrible sinner, ourselves, lowly, earthbound, materialistic, selfish, lacking in true love for God, and in true love for neighbor whom God loves and has created; we are so full of excessive love for creatures of God, in place of Him their Creator. Here we stand; the creature whose treasures, wealth and property, whose 'gods' are on earth. But the earth has been left far behind and left with it are all its treasures, which we held so dear. We who are impure because of earth's impurities; we come before the God Who is absolutely pure, free of all defilement of earth, a Pure Spirit, Who is absolutely, infinitely good. We, the speck of dirt, come before the God of all: the untold wonders of God before a foolish sinful man.

OUR REACTION?

What can be our reaction to this pure light and presence of total goodness? How uncomfortable, how fearful we must be. If the divine judgment comes, the sinner is already seeking a way to escape this terrifying perfection. The sinner knows, only too well, he does not belong in that presence. Here is all love, all goodness and all truth; and before it, we stand, too often sadly lacking in these perfections. Before this true God of infinite perfection, we stand totally exposed, naked in our own sad state. Picture the terrible contrast; the infinite and sublime in God on the one hand, and the foolish and the sinful in us on the other hand. The light of such a terrible contrast cannot be endured.

There is only one recourse, and that, like Adam and Eve after their sin, is to flee, to seek a place where this glaring light of perfection is not found. We have been created for God, for eternal union with Him, and can find only there the fulfillment of all our wishes, our desires and our needs. He has been the true good behind all we always desired, yet He is so far above these, our earthly goods, that we do not fit in His company, we do not belong in His divine presence.

TWO HIDING PLACES.

There are two hiding places where we may flee, where we will not have to endure the terrible presence of this absolute perfection.

Hell: — One of them is called Hell, where the sinner will never have to endure this absolutely pure light. There he will never have to face that perfect goodness of God, which he finds so unbearable. There also, all hopes, desires and needs, all that man was created for will never be satisfied, but rather be totally and eternally frustrated. This is for the sinner who has nothing of God's life in him, no sanctifying grace. There will be terrible suffering of fire, not to purify for better things, for such a one does not ever belong with God, but to punish as is due forever and ever, with a fire that burns the soul, and will burn the body also. There will be no escape, no way to change this terrible state. There will be much company with others who hate the true good, those in heresy and error, those who promoted discord, the earthly, and those who did not truly love Him Who is infinitely lovable. However, the company will be hateful.

The company there, will be with others who are the same as the sinner entering Hell. There will be disgust and horror without end. The many vices that were practiced and sought after on earth will bring punishment of the same kind in Hell, coming to the sinner (for he sought these as his 'god'),

until long after satisfaction is reached and then more yet and on without end to disgust and nausea. So each is given that which he chose here, as his 'god', but only that, and not Him Who is the true God and Who only can fill all our needs and desires and bring true happiness. The true Good will never be his; or happiness, or peace or rest, in fact, all that man was made for, will be lacking him. No suicide, so that one can end it all, will be possible, but there will be an overwhelming urge and constant desire to do so, to totally annihilate the very being given by the Creator, for in Hell there is no hope — only despair and eternal fire!!!

Purgatory: — The other place to hide from this infinite divine goodness is Purgatory. In so many ways, it is like Hell, having similar punishments of fire and frustration of all desires, et cetera, but being very different in a very important way.

Purgatory is a place to flee from God for the unworthy who nevertheless have God's life in them, sanctifying grace. Purgatory too is a terrible place, a place of punishment, a place of much terror, so terrible that the worst punishments and sufferings on earth are as nothing compared with it.

But this fire, which burns the spiritual soul, as in hellfire, is not to endure forever. It burns rather to purify one of the impurities of this world, which have been contracted, to purify our charity, and to purify us of our unjust wrath, our excessive pride, our too great attachments to creatures rather than God their Creator, and all vices man is capable of, which have been forgiven but not atoned for. It is a thousand times easier to suffer before death for these impurities, for the suffering is so terrible. The book Purgatory, by Fr. Schouppe, S. J. gives many examples, which all graphically illustrate this point.

But this terrible suffering is not everlasting as that of Hell. It is a place to flee for those who are unworthy of God yet, but who have something of God in them, that is, the true Faith and sanctifying grace. In Purgatory, there is hope, instead of despair; there is some genuine love of God. This fire burns rather to cleanse so that we may be worthy of the divine presence. It is a merciful fire, and punishment of God's love for the sinner. All know they need this cleansing. They know they as yet do not belong in God's company. They are grateful for this punishment, because it will ready them for God one day, perhaps long in the future, many years by earthly standards, perhaps even centuries, as Fr. Schouppe indicates.

This is the teaching of Our Lord and therefore of the Church and the Saints.

TIME TO CONTEMPLATE.

You and I still have time to contemplate these facts seriously. The light of God's glory shines for us here on earth already now, only it is too often not recognized. It can be recognized only by a humble acceptance of God's words in a Faith resting on grace. Revelation of divine truths, and God's institutions here on earth, such as the Mass and Sacraments celebrated by His Church, and the laws to govern his children here, are all instances of this divine light and glory already now. How terrible it is to reject any of these, as they are of God and His glory, and what a sure sign that is of eternal ruin for us.

So God reveals and gives us a little of His divine light and life already now, only here we must accept it on Faith, whereas in Heaven, it will be plain to see and will bring great joy for all there, since one's understanding and appreciation will then be supported by God.

As Saint John the evangelist, the beloved disciple says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness grasped it not" (John 1:4). The world

is darkness, as is the mind of man so often when preoccupied with this darkness, so this divine light is often not seen or appreciated. Yet the light of God is present already, if only we will see it with the eyes of Faith; that is, humbly and wholeheartedly accept what we cannot understand (and usually not appreciate) now.

But, if we will not believe God's words and works now, we will not see this light of God in eternity either. Our failure to atone adequately for our sins, our seeking after pleasures and goods of this world so totally to the exclusion of God, and many other evils, only assure us there will be punishment to come. Our failure to pray fervently and often, is another sign of future trouble. One, who will not pray well, is, by that fact, showing he does not care for the company of God. There are other matters that he prefers. Such a one will not find that blessed company thrust upon him after death either.

But in our day, when there are so many who are in the state of mortal sin, and who do not choose to have God's life and light, His grace and Faith, in them, that punishment will certainly be non-ending in Hell, for that is their choice.

How awful it is to tamper with any of God's works; for these are of Heaven and are bringing joy now to the angels and saints there. Also to be so satisfied with the cheap earthly light of man's wonders, such as Television, the movie screen, and to be so satisfied with all his deeds, only closes the door to us of the heavenly light of God. We read of 'a wondrous new invention' claimed by Thomas Edison, when he lit up his house and all the grounds around with electric lights, as a show to others of what man can do. This was such a marvel compared to the darkness of night-time otherwise, and made others marvel at the earthly paradise being brought about by man. Of course, electricity has done many good things. But the heavenly light of God is far, far greater, and is referred to often in the Bible as well as other spiritual writings.

This is the light that surrounds God; a light of intense beauty; so wonderful that it brings tears of joy to the eyes of mortals even at the briefest glimpse, as in near death. Here there is all truth; all mysteries are contained here and without end. There is no obstacle to overcome of strange words or languages for we will know directly and at first hand, and there is the fullness of joy without end for all those found worthy to abide near this heavenly Being and Presence.

But the vast majority of mankind today is satisfied with the cheap lights of this world and is totally engrossed in these. Would this alone not indicate that they are headed for Hell!! One wonders, doesn't one? One prays that it is not so! One cannot follow the works of Satan in this life and then expect to spend eternity with God, as common sense tells us. He whose company man seeks here below, shall be his companion (if we can call him that), after death and forever and ever.

But, God now offers us a little of His divine light of truth and His works. To reject that light now, is to reject it in eternity. "Beneath, behind and through it all there is the stupendous truth that no man loses God by accident, no man wanders off the road home in spite of himself, no man is in rebellion against the will of God except by his own open declaration of war" (My Way of Life, [Saint Thomas Aquinas] 1952, page 35). We cannot choose to act in defiance of God's words and works now, and then expect to be in union with Him forever. Our company then can only be that of him who first defied God. Each moment of life, we make the choice between Heaven and Hell. How precious is then, each moment of time, for all eternity rests on it and our use of it. "Great riches are found in each moment's choice between Heaven or Hell" (My Way of Life).

OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

Then carefully consider your life now; how it pleases God, how obedient to Him you are, how much you comply with His word, (and that in spite of what any man says otherwise). Obedience to any man is no excuse for disobedience to God. Many of the Saints had to give their lives for the 'pearl of great price', the true Faith, because it is more valuable than all else, for in it the light of God is found. Then we too, must be prepared to make such a sacrifice for this inestimable treasure.

Also, we must obey all of God's laws to the fullest, and receive His institutions, as He instituted them, and not some man-made version of them. These all we find in the centuries old, and continuous tradition of the Church in her official teaching in all its sameness and continuity. Anything new or different cannot be of God, because God does not ever change.

Are you totally loyal to God? Do you accept all his truths and institutions just as He formed them long ago? Are you obedient to His Will? Consider how great is the terrible danger you face. What a horror to spend eternity in Hell!! How much remorse and regret for what could have been.

How terrible to come before God and recognize that one does not belong in that divine company. We are made to be with God and in union with Him. Then let us adore God properly now, that we may share in the wonders of God and the joy of that adoration in eternity. It is only in truly adoring God that any creature can find happiness, for that is his proper place as a creature. How wonderful is the reward for true love and fidelity, and how easily it can be ours. We so easily love creatures now; then how much easier it should be to love their Creator now too, and to adore Him in the manner He has determined and with the means He has given us.

All of you, who have found new and different ways of adoration or whatever, ask yourselves whether you are really adoring God, or perhaps only each other and serving your pleasures. These ideas, which you profess today, so contrary to all tradition, do you think they will win you salvation. Those ideas which are merely the accommodation to secularism and materialism, to the so-called 'modern times', will they win your salvation?

If they, in their entirety, did not come from God, then you, who follow them, can only be rejecting God and His works now and in eternity. It is surely wise to think about this matter; after death, it will be too late. Don't worry about your neighbor and what he will think; what does God think of you?

If you are not completely loyal to Almighty God now, you are headed for a harsh judgment. Our Lord may tell you in judgment, that since you served man so well, get your reward from him too, and that you have already had this reward on earth. He who seeks Heaven does not seek a reward or acclaim from man. Rather he quietly serves God first and always, and then trusts in God for a reward, forever in Heaven.

We must always obey God, but, of course, abuses or misuses of God's authority in man may not be obeyed. But, God is still a kind Father Who cares for His children on earth and helps them in every way to eternal life; in fact, He holds it out for us to take. For those who will take these precious gifts now, there is waiting a perfection of happiness, a satisfaction of all desires, in the wonders of life with God in His divine light.

REMINDERS OF HEAVEN.

Surround yourselves with beautiful images of Our Lord and His saints in picture and statue, as constant reminders of Heaven where the saints are and where you hope to be. Keep and use blessed sacramentals as means of heavenly grace and divine helps. Receive the Sacraments piously and

truly; and with devotion and frequency, thereby living now in the divine presence in preparation for permanent union with God in Heaven. Strengthen and preserve your Faith in all God's revelations through your practices of Faith, devout readings and meditation.

Always fulfill God's holy Will as lovingly and perfectly as possible. Also, humility is a most important virtue for those who hope for Heaven, and closely connected with it, that of resignation to God's Will. He who humbly resigns himself into the hands of God, no matter what happens to him, is by that very fact very close to God.

So, the veil of this life, which stands before eternity, is really only a testing ground and a time to prepare. Let us not fall in love with the veil, and dedicate our time and efforts to it. "What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul" (Mark, 8:36). It will soon disintegrate for each of us. This life is a mere preparation for the life to come and therein only, lies its importance. How we live it and cooperate with grace determines our life for all eternity, and that is our real life.

DEATH A GREAT REVELATION TO ALL.

Death will bring a great revelation to all; it can be a revelation of God, an eternal Christmas; instead of an end of life, it should be really only a beginning of a most wonderful life for the blessed. Every task under God's Will, every suffering, every proper act of love of God, all lead to this most wonderful reward. So seek God now, but do so wholeheartedly; love God now, but do so with all your powers and at every opportunity and all the time. Seek, wait for, and try to acquire now, the divine light of eternity in Faith, rather than be satisfied with the earthly false lights, which are around us.

Let us serve the true God always, for that is why He created us; and let us do so entirely and with the power of His graces, and all His divine means. No matter what the cost, be ready for Heaven at death. Let us pray for each other that we may meet again before and with God in eternity, in the eternal light, and be there forever in the most blessed company of the Saints.

A most important prayer for every day should be that of three Hail Mary's for a happy death, as the child turning to its mother for help in this most urgent need. It is also a great work of charity to pray daily for the dying. Saint Joseph is the patron of the dying; pray for his intercession with God. Pray to Saint Sylvester, who upon seeing the body of a friend at his funeral, gave up everything and gave himself to penance and prayer because he then realized how passing is this life. "In order to go straight to Heaven, one must make a close acquaintance with the Queen of Heaven" (Father Paul, page 221).

"Eye has not seen or ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinth 2:9).
