

# WHAT IS LIFE?

Rev. James Cunningham, C.S.P.

## God

THE history of man has been a dramatic quest for happiness. Such a motive—the desire that knowledge might bring more happiness—caused Mother Eve to fall prey to the serpent's wiles; it was the hope of a bliss yet unreached that caused Adam to betray his children. Throughout the ages it has been this pursuit which has motivated man's efforts, which gave birth to much of the good shadowed by much of the evil he found. It has been this search which prolonged human life, given to the world great inventions, yet has added so little to the sum total of happiness. Nay! We must confess humbly that man's success has culminated in world-wide misery such as has not been from the beginning until now. For we have sought to find beatitude apart from God.

Perhaps the whole of the human race might be represented by the great Augustine who sought vainly a pleasure the world could not give and found in it only disgust with ephemeral and passing joys. Still he searched in books, in the hearts of his friends, in what the world had to offer and at last in desperation was forced to cry out, "Our hearts are made for Thee, Oh God, and they cannot rest until they rest in Thee."

But just once let man understand that his happiness is to be found in God, that his unquiet heart may find there peace and consolation, his search is at an end. Let him say within himself, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He hath set me in a place of pasture. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me. Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days."

In God there is the happiness we seek. God is the end of the search. Yet the story of each is retold when we hear: "I fled Him down the nights and down the days. I fled Him down the arches of the years; I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind; and in the midst of tears I hid from Him." And we catch the echo of that voice which followed after: "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Yet we cry out, "The suffering is intense!" when the trials of life bear us to the ground, when the miseries of existence seem to demand our very heart's blood, when friends desert us, when evil fortune seems to shadow our days, and tears become our portion in the night. We cry out, "Where art Thou, Lord?" "Where were You when I needed You so; why did You desert me? Why did You leave me to carry on alone?"

A quiet voice, a soothing voice calms us. "I was beside thee in suffering and suffered too; I helped you bear the cross for I once carried a cross; I never left your side when all your friends seemed to turn away, when none would lift a hand in your defense, for I know what it is to be forsaken, to have friends go away. I know what it means to walk the world alone looking for a heart that will give Me shelter. The stars look down and arch My ways with their beams, the shadows tremble in adoring awe, the trees awake from their daydreams, and the flowers nod their lowly heads, the grasses and the shrubs offer homage and the birds of the air wing Me their sweet song; only man lets Me pass unattended as I journey down the eternal years.

"Yet to the birds I gave wing, and shelter, to the flowers their fragrance and protection. How much more have I given you, oh you, of little faith. I am beside you all the way hoping to hear your voice call My name. Though the mother forget the child she has borne, yet will I not forget thee."

No matter what work we do, be it humble or great; no matter our position in life, as silent sufferer or active worker, each of us through the day can turn to God and ask His aid and benediction. We must walk hand in hand with God if we are to find satisfaction in our work and happiness. We can live in His presence, we can look up to Him wherever we are, for apart from Him there is no peace or lasting joy.

And He awaits our call as all through life He stands beside us. At work, and at play we may listen to the Voice which says: "Arise, clasp My hand, come. I will give thee happiness unsurpassed. I am thy God."

## Accomplishment

THERE is an element in the life of every man or woman, a recurring theme, which gives birth to grief and dis-

illusionment. Through school days, to middle age and the winter of life, the sentiment of defeat is not unknown. More often in middle age it comes with bitterness and heartache; we are not achieving what we had set out to accomplish.

In youth we set before ourselves certain ideals of success; now after years of patient labor we find hands empty of achievement, hearts weighed down by the sense of frustration; we feel that life has failed us or we have failed it.

What can we do about it? We have not reached the pinnacle we envisioned in youth, we are not better known now than in the days when hearts were light, when hopes sprung eternally that our names would one day be emblazoned across the world as a success in our chosen field. We hoped there would come a time when people would point us out as one who had arrived, men and women would be glad to shake our hand, friends would rejoice at having known us. Now hearts are heavy for we very definitely have not arrived at success, we have not climbed to pre-eminence: life and its accomplishments are very ordinary. Perhaps life seems a failure.

Yet human failure oftentimes means spiritual success. This fact is exemplified in the life of the Church, for when she has tasted most deeply of temporal prosperity her spiritual failure has been no less marked. Temporal success does not mean spiritual triumph, rather it too often signalizes spiritual misfortune. From a worldly point of view, most of the saints were failures, but today, as always in the history of the Church, one saint is of more value than a hundred thousand ordinary persons who care not for the life of the spirit.

Many of my readers have heard, no doubt, the story of the little Italian poet-missionary. He had been preaching to the inhabitants of a certain town and his efforts seemed in vain. He felt that it was his own life which was the cause of failure, and like Jonas of old was tired of it all. He had given up home, friends: he had made himself a laughing stock to the worldly wise that untrammelled by business affairs he might serve God and bring others to know Him better. Still he seemed to be making no progress.

Going out of the city he sat down beside the road and as he rested exhausted under a tree he fell asleep and dreamed that the heavens were opened. He saw streets paved with gold, a land of contentment, of peace and prosperity, a haven of all good things. A voice spoke: "My son, all this is yours." "But, Lord," he answered, "I do not deserve all this!" "You do," came the reply, "if you do the work of each day as well as you can." Our missionary needed no further urging for he realized that out of apparent failure Almighty God was able to bring success, that just when it seems our human efforts even in our own lives are worthless, then it is that they become most provocative of good.

To those ill at home or in hospital it seems that life offers so little opportunity to do anything for God or for our fellow humans, but it has been said of the cloistered St. Teresa of Avila that her prayers did as much to convert souls to God as did the fatiguing missionary journeys of St. Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies. The sick and suffering are special friends of God, power houses of spiritual energy and can do untold good by offering their pains and sufferings for the conversion of sinners, for the advancement of the Church. There is in the world today an effort on the part of certain nations to outlaw God, to make men forget His name and existence. There is need of expiation of such sacrilege. Perhaps God has chosen you for that work. Nothing to do! You are a very important cog in the spiritual wheel and very necessary.

Failure, frustration! Indeed not. Surely no life could seem to be such an utter failure as the life of Our Divine Lord. In the eyes of men His death seemed to climax a life in which every objective had been destroyed. That apparent failure was the turning point in the world's history.

God has given us a work to do, we must ever seek His will. So many times He removes from our path what we should call success in order that we may be less hindered in accomplishing His will in our regard. He has given us a work to do here and each day we must labor at the task. He has given us the necessary talents, not to each the same amount, but for the value given He has appointed a proportionate task to be done. When it seems to us that we are not "getting anywhere," we would do well to stop and ponder this thought: Does God want me "there"? If He does we will get to our destination by using the talents so lavishly bestowed. **THE WORK OF THE MOMENT WE MUST DO WELL. GOD WILLS IT!** The future we plan He may discard, the future He plans for us is safe and secure. If we do each day as well as we can the work we have to do, be it ever so lowly, we are preparing ourselves to accomplish His work.

Perhaps all his life the good thief who died beside Christ had been faithful; once only he may have

failed and for that had to pay the supreme penalty. Yet for work well done he did gain a reward and though never realizing its worth, through the centuries he has been the model of repentant sinners. His greatest success, his outstanding accomplishment came as death had already begun to glaze his eyes.

Trust God! Do your part. So long as you do, you will never know the pangs of final frustration, for now and at the close of life you will know that a life in accordance with the will of God is an accomplishment and life's work.

### **Offer It Up**

A MOTHER stood beside a hot stove. It was early in the morning and she had to get the working members of the family off to their places of employment. The children had to be made ready for school. There was so much to be done. A sigh escaped her lips as she looked forward to the housework, to the shopping yet to be planned. to the long day which offered no rest from labor, for just when it seemed that a moment might be hers, the children were home from school, and their father would be in shortly for dinner—and until late at night there would be no leisure. And Our Blessed Lord had said: “Pray always.” But how can I pray, thought she, with all this work to do?

And the father off to the factory's hum, or to the office where commerce swiftly passes, thought, as he walked along, really I should try to say some prayers—but how can I? I dare not take my mind off the work of the moment and turn it towards God, for perhaps an accident may happen or my work will not be well done. How can I pray? Prayer is for those people who have more time to spend and less to waste than have I. And so said his daughter and son—and even the children on their way to school said: “We have not time to pray!”

Will they recall the great St. Benedict who sent his monks into the world to save civilization and to preserve its culture? From the hilltop monasteries — hives of spirituality, these young laborers in the vineyard of the Lord brought an understanding of farming, of agriculture, to the barbarians whose only knowledge was of war and of the chase. And wave after wave of barbarian invasion dashed against the shores of the Benedictine spiritual fortress and returned chastened, carrying back to the wild forests of Northern Europe, to a people weaned on the sword and shield, a knowledge of Christ and His Church; but particularly an appreciation of the spiritual quality of work. For the young Benedictine in habit and cowl entered the fields with the barbarians, labored beside them all through the day, and at night after a short hour of prayer, reclined on a pallet as primitive as that used by the Hun or Goth, to whom he brought knowledge of Jesus Christ. His work was not easy. His labors were long and the rewards disheartening, as he saw these converts lapse back time and again into savagery. Yet he was heartened as he went about the task of organizing, directing the plowing, the sowing of the seed, the harvest. He was heartened by the words of his spiritual father, St. Benedict: “Pray, work, my child; for to work is to pray.”

And as mother stands beside the stove in the morning she can turn her heart, if not her eyes to the throne of God and say: “All I do this day, my God, I do for You. I shall be distracted with my many duties; I may forget to turn to You but everything I do this day I offer up to You. Every single action I want to make a prayer.” And the man of business at his “piled high” desk in the morning, or the factory laborer who stands beside the machine, or the erect little typist as she pours forth thousands of words and the machine clatters hour after hour, or the patient ill with racking pain, or the invalid whose bed is her castle—each can say three short words which make of every effort a prayer: “For You, my God!”

But must I not get down on my knees in the morning and again at night and say long prayers? If you can, you should, but the long hours of contemplative prayer are not for you of the world and of business; rather, the hurried offering in the morning, the recurring thought of God on train or subway, and every prayer merits a particular grace—special assistance from Him. Or perhaps in addition to the daily, hourly offering, you may turn your thoughts towards God and His Mother with ejaculatory prayer, or carry a chapel with you, a rosary chapel whose walls are decorated with the fifteen pictured mysteries—the pocket rosary.

Yet morning or night, through the day, in home, or shop, or street, it is possible for each of us to pray always—to merit God's choicest blessings by saying: “This is for You, my God,” and like incense rising to the cathedral dome our prayers ascend to God on high. For every thought, every word, every task, can be a prayer, and a good one, as we offer up to Him our daily deeds.

## **Loneliness**

WE are impressionable creatures, we men and women; sometimes we are privileged to see pictured works of art which make an indelible imprint on our minds; they return in memory time after time with a lesson, and the recollection is not lightly to be cast aside for its spiritual melody lingers on. Such a remembrance I would share with you. I do not recall where I saw the picture, or when, yet I do remember its significance, and the feeling of aloneness that it left behind.

The artist portrays a calm summer morning in the islands of the southern Pacific and a large passenger vessel is at anchor off the Island of Molokai. A priest on board had traveled from Honolulu to visit Father Damien, the good Samaritan of the island, but a new series of police regulations had made it impossible for the captain to land any of his passengers at this plague-infested spot. Word had been sent ashore and Father Damien, who had said Mass at four o'clock, secured a canoe and paddled out to the ship, only to find that the restrictions which had prevented the landing of his friend also prohibited him from going aboard the ship.

He had given his life in the service of the lepers; he had given it freely, and though not at this time affected with the disease, was no longer permitted to dwell among his own. God had, in truth, accepted his sacrifice. He was just as surely separated from them as the tiny ship was from the larger boat. Yet though apart in fact from his Catholic brethren, he is with them this morning in spirit, for the artist has depicted Father Damien standing in the canoe alone between the living and the dying, making his confession, in the presence of the crew and passengers, to the priest on the deck of the ship. Father Damien is to be henceforth alone and as a lonely man, he is to carry on his fight to aid the lepers. And each of us must carry on his fight, spiritual or temporal in life, alone.

One of the most intense of human sufferings is that of loneliness. Even the great human heart of Christ reacted to that pain. Do you remember when He went into the garden to pray that He left His Apostles to watch outside? In a short time He came back to find that in His greatest sorrow, He was alone: His disciples were asleep, "Could you not watch one hour with Me?" From the Cross, He saw the Apostles in hiding, His friends scattered through fear, only a few loyal ones left, from His human heart again was wrung a cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Like Our Divine Master, we too, often feel the pains of loneliness and when we do, we are most like to Him. There are many to participate in our joys, some few in our sufferings, but there are very few who will bear the cross with us. No matter how many friends we have we must go forward alone, and in the last journey of life from time to eternity, again we travel alone.

The feeling of isolation must have been particularly oppressive in the case of Father Damien. He was priest and doctor, architect and laborer, yet the one sound man in the city of leprosy, the home of the living dead. Separated from his sound brethren of his own will, he could not enter into the sufferings of the lepers entirely for he had not yet felt the suffering which was theirs, as we never know what Christianity means until we have suffered.

Each Sunday, year after year, he addressed his flock: "My dear brethren in Christ"; but a change was coming. One morning he experienced a new sensation. He had spilled a cup of boiling water on his foot and though the skin blistered, he did not feel it. The sign of the leper. On the following Sunday his lepers received a new address, this time he began: "We lepers." At last he was one of them. No longer alone, he was really in spirit and in truth one of his lepers.

For some the days of earthly pilgrimage are quickly approaching the end, for others they are prolonged, but for all, though the path may be steep and the journey difficult, it must be remembered that we do not go forward alone, but as we offer every thought, word and deed, every suffering and sorrow, to Him Who died for us, we have His constant companionship and we know that to suffer with Him now, however little, means that one day we shall also reign with Him.

## **He Carried the Cross**

THERE are many incidents in the happenings of Holy Week which escape our attention as we move rapidly through the tragedy associated with the last few hours of Our Redeemer. One of these is particularly deserving of our interest.

We shall go back two thousand years and in imagination visit the home of a farmer little known in the City of

Jerusalem. He is a stranger to the Holy City and has brought his family all the way from Libya in North Africa. Each day he goes to his fields outside the city walls to super-intend his farm, returning in the evening to his family.

Tonight he returns home, reclines exhausted on a bench and closes his eyes.

“Did you have a busy day in the fields, Simon?” asks his wife.

“Yes,” he replies in the manner of one who is occupied with his own thoughts and would rather be silent. It is unlike his cheery greeting and his wife wonders if he is ill as she goes to his side.

“What is the matter, father?” ask the two sons, Alexander and Rufus, who have noticed that their father is unusually tired and worn.

“I shall be all right soon,” he says, “but I have seen, have taken part in a fearful thing today.”

Solicitude is mirrored on the face of his wife as she looks toward the children. Fear is reflected on the faces of the boys for they are strangers in a strange land.

“Oh, do not you worry, I have done nothing wrong; I should feel ashamed and yet in spite of the hardship I have undergone I feel strangely happy. You see,” as his wife and boys sit beside him, “I was returning from the fields today and as I approached the walls of the city I saw a procession on the way to Calvary.”

“Oh, yes, the executions today,” said one of the boys. “At the last minute they added another criminal to the group and three were crucified. Did you see the executions?”

“Yes, I saw them. I was very close to the three all during their last hours.”

“You should not do that, Simon; it is a bad example to the boys and we are not barbarians,” objected the wife.

“I had no choice. As the procession came near me, the third criminal fell beneath the weight of the heavy timbers and all stopped. The soldiers looked at the throng which was following and when I passed by, one of them came to me roughly and asked from whence I had come. I told him, and as I did the others cried out that he should make me carry it; that I should carry the Cross behind the fallen criminal. No Roman, they told me could thus demean himself and no Jew could carry a cross or he would lose caste in the city. I objected, but they said no one would know and they forced me over to the procession and put the Cross on my shoulders.

“Did you carry the Cross all the way, father?” asked Rufus.

“Yes, I started behind the Christ, the third criminal. He gave me just one look, a glance of great tenderness. How sorrowful He seemed, yet how serene. The Cross was extremely heavy. I had objected and would have thrust it aside and run away if I could have done so. But a voice seemed to echo in my heart: ‘Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your soul. For My yoke is sweet and My burden light.’ And as I carried that Cross it seemed to grow lighter. And I followed in His footsteps, blood-stained, halting. He was indeed a brave man; He fell again along the way. I halted, too, but now the fear was gone; the Cross was not a heavy load, for I carried it willingly. It was rather a light burden and I was grateful for the favor which was thrust upon me. And then we came to the top of the hill.”

“Did you remain for the execution?” whispered the boy Alexander.

“Yes, I could not leave. I came home as they took the body down from the Cross. A grievous wrong has been done this day—the Lord will repay.”

“But, Simon, it is a disgrace for any Jew to carry a cross. It is a shame for you. What will those who know us say? What about our boys?” moaned his wife.

“I don’t know what those who know us will say, but I feel that we shall never be ashamed of what I have this day done, nor will our boys ever need to hang their heads because their father helped Jesus Christ to carry His Cross.”

Those of us who follow in the footsteps of Our Master, who carry a cross through life, need never be ashamed of the favor Our Divine Redeemer has bestowed upon us, nor should we ever cast it aside. For what today is our grief and sorrow will tomorrow be our eternal triumph and glory. And wherever the Gospel story is read it is the proud boast of Alexander and Rufus that their father, Simon, coming in from the country helped Jesus the Lord carry the Cross on that great day.

### **Twin Keys to the Kingdom**

ONE of the worthwhile sights in the State of California is Yosemite National Park. Leaving the main arteries of

traffic at the town of Merced, one journeys some eighty miles back into the hill country, through land as vigorously charming, as interesting as is to be found anywhere. The road is narrow and winding, hills and long slopes vary the scenery until we come to the river which runs out of the valley and follows its winding course to the entrance of one of God's wonder spots in this world of His.

Approaching the gateway in February when a light snow filled the air, one might notice the great peaks which guard the entrance. They seem to frown forbiddingly as we pass through the hollowed stone approach and into the park. Twin sentinels guard the entrance, their summits high in the clouds buffeted by many a storm. We are not dismayed by the clouds about the peaks of the granite guardians because we know that in the park there is protection from storm, that here there are homes which seldom know the tempests of the High Sierras. Along tree-bordered roads we catch glimpses of scenes which have made Yosemite famous; the Bridal Veil falls with its thin strip of water in the distance dropping hundreds of feet to the valley below, the double drop of Yosemite Falls echoes in our ears as we come closer to it and pass. Raising our eyes we see the Great Half Dome, the reflections in Mirror Lake, the white-mantled mountain tops which until late in summer will not lose their snowy covering. All these give promise of greater visions to come. Yet the sight one seldom forgets about Yosemite, is the stern forbidding aspect of the cliffs which guard its approach.

The spiritual life is not unlike the entrance to Yosemite Valley and there are many who turn back because of the tall and forbidding spires. Unlike those which guard the famous valley, the stalwart guardians of the spiritual life are well known to each of us and need not a long journey to be found. Unlike the crags which look down upon the gate of the valley and up to which we look in awe, the two watchdogs of the spiritual life, we may use that term, hold the gate and without their permission we may never enter its sacred precincts.

And the name of the first of the guardians is called prayer. Prayer is so important for each of us who would make progress in virtue that we might liken it to one of the twin motors on a modern air transport. Without prayer it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God. So necessary is prayer that the Church has set aside a time for official prayer that each one may in part fulfill his obligation as we take part in the prayer of the Church on each Sunday and holyday.

The correspondingly important virtue in the life of the soul, the other motor of the transport, the virtue which goes hand in hand with prayer is the virtue of penance or sacrifice. This virtue is so important for salvation that the Church sets aside a special time of penance, each Friday, when we abstain from meat. She designates certain seasons of the year as times for special penance, the Ember Days, Advent and Lent. Without some degree of penance and prayer it is impossible for anyone to enter God's kingdom.

If we look through the catalogue of the saints of the Church we shall find that from the lowliest to the greatest, not one of them gained the glory which has illuminated his name, which has raised him to veneration on our altars, not one of them has been a success in the spiritual life, unless he or she has climbed along the king's highway of the holy cross. For the mile-stones along this path bear but two words, prayer and penance. The more we pray the more willing we are to make sacrifices, to forget our own wishes, to subordinate our own desires that others may be benefited, but best of all that God may be well served. The more penance we do, the greater will become our spirit of prayer.

In the valley of the spiritual life there are visions to be seen, sights that will delight the eye of the spirit. In the valley of the spiritual life there is security from tempest and joy and happiness in God's service. To reach the valley we must be friends of the sentinels, we must know the passwords which are also their names; and those who would enter into the valley and find the peace God has reserved for those who love Him, from little to great, must make abundant use of the passwords. Those who have explored the valley, know its hidden nooks, have enjoyed its treasures, are those who have come closer to God through the two keys He offers. To know Him, to love Him, to serve Him better, to acquire peace and contentment here and rest on the hope of eternal felicity hereafter, there are two words to know, penance and prayer, and these two guard the entrance to the Kingdom of God.

### **Courage**

IN the pleasant islands of the South Sea where nature bestows its blessings lavishly on all creation, humanity has been cursed with the most frightful of scourges, leprosy. Linked together inseparably in the struggle against this

disease there is to be found in the Island of Molokai, indeed in the whole world, the memory of the saintly servant of the lepers, Father Damien.

For many centuries leprosy has afflicted man. From the earliest days down to our own time the leper has been looked upon as an outcast, to be forgotten and disregarded even by those of his own flesh and blood. Coming from Europe the plague found a fertile soil in the islands, spread slowly at first but presently took hold and played havoc among the islanders as perhaps nowhere else in the world.

Mistaken human efforts, error upon error upon error by authorities who tried vainly to isolate the living dead only increased the terror of the disease. Finally, in desperation, an editorial appeared in a Honolulu newspaper of April 15, 1873: "If a noble Christian preacher, a priest or Sister should be inspired to go and sacrifice a life to console these poor wretches that would be a royal soul to shine forever on a throne reared by human love." Such love would need unparalleled courage, the love to inspire such courage must needs be supernatural. The editorial was to bear valuable fruit.

It was a young Belgian priest, in the islands but a few years who heard the call. "I will go to Molokai," said he, "and labor for the poor lepers. whose wretched state of bodily and spiritual misfortune has often made my heart bleed within me." At that moment there was a vessel lying in the harbor ready to sail for Molokai with a cargo of fifty lepers, and two hours after making his offer, Father Damien, without even a change of clothing, with no personal effects, without even saying goodbye to any of his friends, was on the boat bound for the leper colony.

That evening the ship returned without him, it had left him without supplies or extra clothing to sleep under the trees. With abounding courage and trust in God his only weapons he was to make the name of his leper colony famous the world over. He entered it an obscure priest. He was to leave, when he died of leprosy himself, a name emblazoned among the names of humanity's saints and heroes.

What must have been his need of courage, that firmness of spirit which enabled him to face the danger without fear though he recognized all the dangers involved.

It is spiritual courage which we find in the saint of every age. For it takes courage to be a saint, courage which led Bernadette of Lourdes to carry the story of her apparition to the much-feared parish priest, which led Joan of Arc from the pleasant fields of Domremy to the wars, to the costume of the soldier, to the death when she knew she was right. If there are fewer saints in the world today it is because there are fewer men and women of courage. It requires tenacity of spirit, strength of will of high type to keep on persevering in what we know to be right, to be God's will, even though evildoers seem to prosper. Courage, spiritual courage is the soul of progress for without it there can be no advancement in the life of the spirit.

Father Damien went to the lepers to act as a source of spiritual consolation and advice. He found that he was to become the guide and protector, the spiritual father not only of his Catholic flock but of the eight hundred lepers who made up the colony.

Unequipped physically, yet confident spiritually that God would provide, he set hand to the task for he knew his lepers to be of much more value than the birds of the air or lilies of the field.

God has never deserted those who have trust in Him and have hearts courageous. The greater the demands we make, the more pleasure is His in granting our requests. We have our difficulties, insignificant to those faced by Damien, but if we put our hands to the plow as did he, our reward, like his, shall be success here, glory hereafter.

It is the spiritual quality in every saint, every man or woman of God which leads them on to Him when all is dark and dreary. It is courage in Damien, in every saint that we find mirrored in the cry of Columbus, "Sail on." The very winds forget their way and even God from the dread seas has gone. Comes the cry, a light, land. The brave admiral not only gained a world but gave that world its grandest lesson of courage. "Sail on."

Under the guidance of men like to the apostle of the lepers may we find example. Led on by their courage may we ever re-echo the words, "Sail on," in our spiritual lives, until one day the cry "Sail on" is changed to "Land" and we find ourselves riding at anchor in the pleasant harbor of Heaven.

## **Death**

SHROVE TUESDAY was the scene of festivity, of joy and frolic in New Orleans. It was the day of Mardi Gras for

that famed southern city. But into the midst of pageantry and laughter there stole an unwelcome guest. Death! Evening papers carried the story of one found dead while making ready to enjoy the pre-Lenten holiday. Though an unwelcome figure, he could not be called an unexpected visitor. “Who is the man that shall live and not see Death?” says the royal Psalmist.

On Ash Wednesday the Church begins her annual retreat, the forty days of Lent as she places upon our foreheads blessed ashes, symbolic of penance—ashes which call to mind our beginning and our end. “Remember, O man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.”

She would not mar our happiness, rather would she give to our days a more lasting joy, placing before us the just appraisal of life, the scale which balances all things both great and small and life is balanced, evaluated by death.

Everything that we accomplish is measured by a two-fold standard. Everything that happens is viewed from two opposing vantage points. Ideas go in pairs. They balance each other. We enjoy health the more after illness. We recognize the bad in proportion to our knowledge of the good. We feel poverty to be a heavier burden after the enjoyment of wealth. It is joy which softens sorrow, while smiles are tempered by tears. Yesterday we feasted—today we fast. We are better able to appraise each deed if we weigh it, if we evaluate it by a twofold standard, its pleasant and painful views.

We love living, not that life in itself is so much to be prized when its charm is gone—when the bloom of youth, or dignity of middle age is blighted by a heavy cross. Yet we keep going forward to that sleep by which our life is rounded. It is the thought of living that the Church would bring us today—of the living which is worthwhile, of the living which gives to each of those who taste it deeply and cherish it carefully, a clearer understanding of its responsibilities. For across the background of living, the Church drops a raven black screen, and on it is the representation of death. It is that thought which keeps living balanced, for when we pass beyond that screen there is no returning.

A saddening thought with which to begin Lent. No doubt it is, but it is the thought of death which has brought sinners to repentance and saints to God. It is death which equalizes all the injustices of life and brings surcease from sorrow and pain. It is that somber thought which brings us to the art of living well, of working or suffering as well as we can, for we are doing it for God. The Psalmist repeats his warning: “Remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin.”

Look at living against the background of dying! Are you satisfied with the living that is yours, with the life that God gave you and the manner in which you use it? Do you feel that He is satisfied? Were the night to call you from this life, could a friendly hand consign you to the grave and write above you these words: “Grateful for life and contented in death”? It is the art of living which stands out best against the background of dying. Or would you plead for time that you might leave behind you some permanent work, time to rebuild shattered hopes of private and public life, time for one more opportunity to do good for mankind, the hope you had when life began? And only the echo answers. “This night do they require thy soul of thee.” So live that you may not fear death.

Nihil Obstat:  
ARTHUR J. SCANLAN. S.T.D.  
Censor Librorum.

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\* PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES.  
Archbishop of New York.  
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