
Christian Spirituality in the Dying Process

*How does our faith guide us as we reflect on
the end of earthly life?*

What is Death?

- Separation of the soul from the body
- End of our time on earth
- Going “home”
 - *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”* (Philippians 3:20-21)
 - *“Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.”* (Romans 5:8)
- “Life is changed not ended”

What about *dying* itself?

- Some speak of being more afraid of dying than of death itself.
- Dying is:
 - Painful
 - Can make one feel helpless and dependent
 - Mysterious
 - Unknown
 - No control
- Note that we live in a time in which we can often eliminate pain, feel independent, know whatever we want to know, and control much around us.

What about *dying* itself? (2)

- To embrace the dying process now is another way we can be countercultural.
 - Guided by our faith, we can say that we don't have to be in control of every moment.
 - We don't have to know exactly when we will die.
 - It's ok to be dependent at the end of life. We were created by God to live among others, not to be separate "islands" from one another.
 - To be dependent on someone else is a very human quality

"If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." (Romans 6:8)

What about *dying* itself? (3)

- We seek to face the reality of death with the confidence of faith
 - That doesn't mean it will be easy; it simply means that we know God will guide us through it.

“We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

What about *dying* itself? (4)

Suffering can have value for us spiritually.

- Opportunity to unite our suffering to that of Jesus
- Opportunity to pray for ourselves, family and friends, and the world as a whole
- The time God gives us on earth is never useless. It can always be turned to something good.

We are stewards, not owners, of our lives

Our life ultimately belongs to God and with our life, we can glorify God.

For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. (Romans 14:8)

We are stewards, not owners, of our lives (2)

Our earthly life is always a good in and of itself, even though it's not the Supreme Good. This balance allows us to forgo certain “extraordinary means” of treatment at the end of life but also keeps us from considering euthanasia, “action or omission which of itself or by intention causes death, in order that all suffering may in this way be eliminated.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Declaration on Euthanasia,” May 5, 1980)

“I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26)

Why don't we like to talk about death?

It seems so taboo.

But everyone will experience it.

Does a fear of death prevent us from speaking about it, making funeral plans, discussing end-of-life care with loved ones, etc?

Euthanasia takes a life but also more

Euthanasia is wrong because it is a direct attack on life itself.

It also robs family and friends of the chance to care for the dying person.

It increases the idea of the human person as simply “useful” rather than being a good in and of him/herself

If it becomes widely practiced, does our society become less compassionate?

Medicine is called to care even when it cannot cure. Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide eliminate that reality and make medicine more functional--more focused only on cure.

What is the best way to die?

Asleep and unknowing?

- Often the preference of people today
- Painless and with no time of helplessness/dependency

Or awake and alert?

- Seen as the “better way” in the Middle Ages
- Allows one to say goodbye, to prepare spiritually, and consciously embrace suffering/unite that suffering to Jesus’s suffering

Conclusion

“In him [Jesus] the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come.

Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.”

--”Preface I for the Dead,” *The Roman Missal*

