

All Souls 08

It is always good when you visit the sick to find that they are surrounded by family. You remember the remark of St. Teresa of Calcutta that the greatest poverty is loneliness. That is proven by the fact that the greatest punishment prisons inflict on prisoners is solitary confinement. If it lasts long enough, prisoners can go crazy, for we are not meant to be alone, we are social by nature. But how hard it must be for those who are conscious and know that they are dying and find themselves alone in the last moments of their lives. Mercifully, many of us lose consciousness before our final moments come. But if a person is conscious and knows the end is near, how hard it must be to be completely alone. Even for those surrounded by family, death is hard, and in a certain sense the dying person meets death alone. But if there is no one else present, this loneliness must be intensified a thousand times over.

We might whisper a prayer for those who will die alone today. Then we might add a prayer for ourselves, that God will grant us the grace not to die alone, that some of our loved ones will be with us at the end.

But here our faith comes in because it tells us that we are never alone, that the Lord Jesus is with us, that he has died before us and for us, and that he is now present to help us die well. “Are you unaware of the fact that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” So Paul writes to the Romans. Thus he is telling us that our baptism was a dress rehearsal for our deaths. In it we died and were buried with Jesus. As you know, in the early days candidates for baptism went down into a pool of water, emerged from it, were anointed and clothed with a new garment and given a candle. What the ceremony said symbolically was that they had died with Christ and had then risen to a new life. That means that we, the baptized, are now post-death people, that we now live a new life, that of the brothers and sisters of the risen Jesus.

Since Jesus has already died, we who live his new life always have him with us. But he can be especially with us in the difficult times of our lives, for he himself went through many such moments. But he can be especially with us in the difficult moments of our dying because he himself died so cruelly. It has been the custom of Catholics to be buried with the rosary in their hands. What a beautiful symbol of our trust in the power of the Mother of the Lord to be with us before the judgment seat of her son. But in the

moments before death there is another Christian symbol we should have at hand, the crucifix, because it reminds us of how Jesus suffered in his death, and it will help us to join our own suffering with his.

In the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans, verses 36-39, Paul writes these beautiful words: “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword: As it is written: ‘For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

No, death will not separate us from Jesus. It will be then that he will be most with us. We pray for ourselves, that we may die well. We pray for those who have gone before us “marked with the sign of faith.” We pray for all the dead, that they may all find themselves at home with God in eternal life where all our tears will

be wiped away and where we will sit down together to dine at the banquet of life.

die with him. then we can share our death with Jesus in his dying.

the moment of our death. In fact, all the hard moments of our lives we can be especially with Jesus because he endured many hard moments.