

PREPARATION FOR DEATH

BY

ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI

Doctor of the Church



>>sequel>>

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SAVED
PROTESTATION FOR A HAPPY DEATH...
HYMN: Mary our Hope

To Mary Immaculate Ever Virgin,

**TO HER WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, AND BLESSED AMONG ALL THE
CHILDREN OF ADAM:**

**TO THE DOVE, THE TURTLE, THE BELOVED OF GOD:
HONOR OF THE HUMAN RACE, DELIGHT OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY.
HOUSE OF LOVE, EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY:
MIRROR OF ALL VIRTUES: MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE,
MOTHER OF HOLY HOPE, AND MOTHER OF MERCY:
ADVOCATE OF THE MISERABLE, DEFENCE OF THE WEAK, LIGHT OF THE
BLIND, PHYSICIAN OF THE SICK:
GATE OF HEAVEN: ANCHOR OF CONFIDENCE, CITY OF
REFUGE, ARK OF LIFE, RAINBOW
OF PEACE, HAVEN OF SALVATION:
STAR OF THE SEA, AND SEA OF SWEETNESS:
ADVOCATE OF SINNERS, HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE IN DESPAIR, HELP
OF THE ABANDONED: COMFORTER OF THE AFFLICTED,
CONSOLATION OF THE DYING, AND
JOY OF THE WORLD:
HER AFFECTIONATE AND LOVING, THOUGH VILE AND UNWORTHY
SERVANT, HUMBLY DEDICATES THIS WORK.**

**AIM OF THE WORK.
(THIS SHOULD BE READ.)**

**OME persons asked me to write a book on the
Eternal Maxims, for the use of those who desire to
establish themselves in virtue and to advance in a
spiritual life. Others requested me to prepare a collection**

of matter for the sermons of the missions and of the spiritual exercises. Not to multiply books, labor, and expense, I resolved to compose the work in the present form, with the hope that it might answer both purposes. To render it useful as a book of meditations for seculars, I have divided the considerations into three points. Each point will serve for one meditation, and therefore I have annexed to each point affections and prayers. I entreat my readers not to grow weary, if, in those prayers, they always find petitions for the grace of perseverance and of divine love. For us, these are the two graces most necessary for the attainment of eternal salvation.

The grace of divine love is, according to St. Francis de Sales, the grace which contains in itself all graces: because the virtue of charity toward God brings with it all other virtues. *Now all good things come to me together with her (Wisd. VII, II)* He who loves God is humble, chaste, obedient, and mortified; in a word, he possesses all virtues. " Love," says St. Augustine, " and do what you wish" (*Ama, et fac quod vis*). They who love God labor to avoid whatever is offensive to him, and seek to please him in all things.

The grace of perseverance is that grace by which we obtain the eternal crown. St. Bernard says that Paradise is promised to those who begin a good life, but is only given to those who persevere. " To beginners a reward is promised, but to him who perseveres it is given;" (*De modo bene vivere, s. 6*) But this gift of perseverance is, as the Fathers teach, given only to those who ask it. Hence St. Thomas asserts that to enter heaven continual prayer is necessary. And our Redeemer said: *We ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke XIII, 1)* It is because they do not pray for the gift of perseverance that so many miserable sinners, after having obtained pardon, lose again the grace of God. Their sins are forgiven; but

because they afterward neglect to ask of God the grace of perseverance, particularly in the time of temptations, they relapse into sin. And although the grace of final perseverance is altogether gratuitous, and cannot be merited by good works; still Suarez teaches that it can be infallibly obtained by prayer: and according to St. Augustine, it may be merited by humble supplication.^(De Dono persev. C. 6)

This necessity of prayer I have demonstrated at length in another little work, entitled *The Great Means of Prayer*. This book, though small, has cost me a great deal of labor. I consider it to be of extreme utility to all sorts of persons; and I unhesitatingly assert that, among all spiritual treatises, there is none, and there can be none, more necessary than that which treats on prayer as a means of obtaining eternal salvation.

To render these considerations useful to preachers who have but few books or little time for reading, I have furnished these considerations with texts of Scripture and passages from the Fathers, which are short, but strong and animated, as they ought to be in sermons. The three points of each consideration will supply matter for one sermon. I have endeavored to collect from many authors the sentiments which appeared to me best suited to move the will, and have inserted several of them expressed briefly, that the reader may select and extend at pleasure those that please him most. May all tend to the glory of God !

I pray my reader to recommend me to Jesus Christ, whether I am living or dead (Now that St. Alphonsus Liguori is a canonized Saint we ask for his intercession); and I promise to do the same for all those who perform this act of charity toward me. Live Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope !

PREPARATION FOR DEATH;

OR,

Considerations on the Eternal Truths.

USEFUL TO ALL AS MEDITATIONS. SERVICEABLE TO
PRIESTS FOR SERMONS.

CONSIDERATION I.

Portrait of a Man who has recently gone into
the Other World.

"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." — *Gen.*
iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

The Body on the Death-bed.

CONSIDER that you are dust, and that you shall return to dust. A day will come when you shall die, and rot in a grave, where *worms shall be your covering (Isai., xiv, 11)*. The same lot awaits all, the nobleman and the peasant, the prince and the vassal. The moment the soul leaves the body, it shall go to eternity, and the body shall return to dust. *Thou shalt send forth their breath, and they shall fail and shall return to their dust (Ps. ciii, 29)*.

Imagine that you behold a person who has just expired. Look at that body still laid on the bed, the head fallen on the chest, the hair in disorder and still bathed in the sweat of death, the eyes sunk, the cheeks hollow, the face the color of ashes, the lips and tongue like iron, the body cold and heavy. The beholders grow pale and

tremble. How many, at the sight of a deceased relative or friend, have changed their life and retired from the world! Still greater horror will be excited when the body begins to putrefy. Twenty-four hours have not elapsed since the death of that young man, and his body has already begun to exhale an offensive smell. The windows must be opened; a great quantity of incense must be used; and, to prevent the communication of disease to the entire family, he must soon be transferred to the church, and buried in the earth. **" If he has been one of the rich or nobles of the earth, his body shall send forth a more intolerable stench," («Gravius foetent divitum corpora» In Hexamer. 1. 6, c. 8) says Saint Ambrose.**

Behold the end of that proud, of that lewd and voluptuous man! Before death desired and sought after in conversations, now become an object of horror and disgust to all who behold him. His relatives are in haste to remove him from the house; they hire men to shut him up in a coffin, to carry him to the church-yard and throw him into a grave. During life, the fame of his wit, of his politeness, of the elegance of his manners, and of his facetiousness, was spread abroad; but after death he is soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise (Ps. ix, 7).*

On hearing the news of his death, some say, He was an honor to his family; others say, He has provided well for his children. Some regret his death because he had done them some service during life; others rejoice at it because it is an advantage to them. But in a little time no one speaks of him. In the beginning, his nearest relatives feel unwilling to hear his name, through fear of renewing their grief. In the visits of condolence, all are careful to make no mention of the deceased; and should any happen to speak of him, the relatives exclaim, For God's sake, do not mention his name!

Consider that as you have acted on the occasion of the death of friends and relatives, so others will act on the occasion of your death. The living take part in the scene. They occupy the possessions and offices of the deceased; but the dead are no longer remembered—their name is scarcely ever mentioned. In the beginning, their relatives are afflicted for a short time; but they will soon be consoled by the share of the property of the deceased which falls to them.

Thus in a short time your death will be rather a source of joy; and in the very room in which you have breathed forth your soul, and in which you have been judged by Jesus Christ, others will dance, and eat, and play, and laugh as before. And where will your soul then be ?

Affections and Prayers.



Jesus, my Redeemer! I thank Thee for not having taken me out of life when I was Thy enemy. For how many years have I deserved to be in hell! Had I died on such a day or such a night, what should be my lot for all eternity? Lord, I thank Thee; I accept my death in satisfaction for my sins, and I accept it in the manner in which Thou shalt be pleased to send it. But since Thou hast borne with me until now, wait for me a little longer. *Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little! (Job x, 20).* Give me time to bewail, before Thou judgest me, the offences I have offered to Thee. I will no longer resist Thy calls. Who knows but the words which I have just read may be the last call for me ? I acknowledge that I am unworthy of mercy. Thou hast so often pardoned me, and I have ungratefully offended Thee again. *A contrite and humble heart, O God! Thou wilt not despise? Since, O Lord, Thou knowest not how to despise a contrite and humble heart, behold the penitent traitor who has*

recourse to Thee. For Thy mercy's sake, cast me not away from Thy face. Thou hast said: *Him that cometh to me I will not cast out (John vi, 37)*. It is true that I have outraged Thee more than others, because I have been favored more than others with Thy lights and graces. But the blood Thou hast shed for me encourages me, and offers me pardon if I repent. My Sovereign Good! I am sorry with my whole soul for having insulted Thee. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee for the future. I have offended Thee sufficiently. The remainder of my life I wish to spend, not in offending Thee, but only in weeping unceasingly over the insults I have offered to Thee, and in loving with my whole heart a God worthy of infinite love. O Mary, my hope ! pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

The Body in the Grave.

But, Christian soul, that you may see more clearly what you are, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave; contemplate dust, ashes, worms; and sigh." 2 Behold how that corpse first turns yellow, and then black. Afterwards, the entire body is covered with a white, disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime, which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms, which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and, in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton, which in the course of time falls to pieces; the bones separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind.*

Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor, which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman, who was called the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter into his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armor, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave, where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God! that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye saints! who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights; now your bones are honored as sacred relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, expecting the last day, on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. The true love for the body consists in treating it here with rigor and contempt, that it may be happy for eternity; and in refusing it all pleasures, which might make it miserable forever.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, then, O my God ! to what my body, by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced ! to worms and rottenness. This does not afflict me; on the contrary, I rejoice that this flesh of mine, which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is, that, to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. *The Lord waiteth, that He may have mercy on you (Isa., xxx, 18).*

Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catharine of Genoa, " My Jesus, no more sins! no more sins!" I will no longer abuse Thy patience. O my crucified Love, I will not wait till the confessor places the crucifix in my hands at the hour of death. From this moment I embrace Thee; from this moment I recommend my soul to Thee. *Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit (Ps., xxx, 6).* My soul has been so many years in the world, and has not loved Thee. Give me light and strength to love Thee during the remainder of my life: I will not wait to love Thee at the hour of death. From this moment I love Thee; I embrace Thee, and unite myself to Thee ; and I promise never more to depart from Thee, O most holy Virgin ! bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain for me the grace never to lose him more.

THIRD POINT.

Let us Labor to Save our Souls.

My brother, in this picture of death behold yourself and what you must one day become. "Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return." Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother, and my sister (Job, xvii, 14).*

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you must necessarily die (Lign. Vit. De hum. C. 4). If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done ? Now that you have life, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that, to guide the

vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm; and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. Says St. Bernard, "Look to the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame". "Remember the sins of manhood and weep." "Look to the present disorders of your life; tremble", and hasten to apply a remedy.

When St. Camillus de Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And what do I do for my soul, who have time? This the Saint said through humility. But my brother, you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the fruitless fig-tree of which the Lord said: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none (Luke, xiii, 7)* You have been in this world for more than three years; what fruit have you produced? Remember, says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers, but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit of the time which God in his mercy gives you: do not wait until you desire time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told, Time shall be no longer; depart; (Apoc., x,6) the time for leaving this world has arrived; what is done, is done.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God! I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee, *Cut it down—why cumbereth it the ground?* Yes; for so many years during which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briers and thorns of sin. But, O Lord! Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. *Seek and you shall find?* I seek Thee, O my God! and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I

am sorry with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee; but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee.

Thou hast said : *If you shall ask me anything in my name, that I will do (John, xiv, 14)*. My Jesus, trusting in this great promise, I ask, in Thy name and through Thy merits, Thy grace and Thy love. Grant that Thy grace and Thy holy love may abound in my soul, in which sin has abounded. I thank Thee for having given me grace to make this petition by inspiring the prayer, Thou showest that Thou dost intend to hear it. Hear me, O my Jesus; give me a great love for Thee; give me a great desire to please Thee, and give me strength to do Thy will. O Mary, my great advocate ! do thou also listen to my cry, and pray to Jesus for me.

CONSIDERATION II.

With Death at Ends...

"An end is come, the end is come."—Ezek. vii. 6.

FIRST POINT.

Death Deprives us of Everything.

BY worldlings they only are esteemed happy who enjoy the pleasures, the riches, and the pomps of this world; but death puts an end to all these earthly goods. *For what is your life ? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while (James iv, 15)*. The vapors

exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed with light by the sun, make a splendid appearance; but how long does their splendor last? It vanishes before the first blast of the wind. Behold that nobleman: to-day he is courted, feared, and almost adored; to-morrow he is dead, despised, reviled, and trampled upon. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas a Kempis, took delight in speaking of a beautiful house which he had built for himself: a friend told him that it had one great defect. "What is it?" said he. "It is," answered the other, "that you have made a door in it." "What," rejoined the brother of a Kempis, "is a door a defect?" "Yes," answered the friend; "for through this door you must be one day carried dead, and must leave the house and all things."

Death, in fine, strips man of all the goods of this world. Oh, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it, and to see others take possession of his furniture, of his money, and of all his other goods ! The servants leave him in the grave, with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions at death, that when his body should be carried to the place of burial a person should go before, holding his winding-sheet suspended from a pole, and crying aloud: "This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave."

When the body of the prince is laid in the grave, his flesh drops off; and behold, his skeleton can no longer be distinguished from others. "Contemplate," St. Basil says, "the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been a master" (Hom. II, E. B. app). Diogenes was one day seen

by Alexander the Great seeking with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip your father. I am not able to distinguish it: if you can find it, show it to me." "Men," says Seneca, "are born unequal; but after death all are equal" (Ep. 91). And Horace says that death brings down the sceptre to the level of the spade. In a word, when death comes, *the end comes*; all ends, we leave all things; and of all that we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

Affections and Prayers,

My Lord! since Thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly, grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods, before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee, who art an infinite good! O my Jesus! my heavenly physician, cast Thine eyes on my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. If Thou wishest Thou canst make me clean (Matt. viii, 2). I know that Thou art able and willing to heal me; but in order to heal me, Thou wishest me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against Thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in Thy power to heal me. *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee (Ps. xi, 5)*. I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me; and now Thou makest me feel that Thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done Thee, if I detest them. "But if the wicked do penance ... I will not remember all his iniquities."—*Ezek. xviii. 21*. Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasures I have given Thee. For the future I will

lose all things, even life, rather than forfeit Thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without Thy grace ?

Ah, assist me! Thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. No, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of Thy love. Thou art my only Lord; Thou hast created and redeemed me; Thou hast loved me more than all others; Thou alone hast merited my love; Thee alone do I wish to love.

SECOND POINT.

Glory and Power on the Death-bed.

At the hour of death, Philip II., King of Spain, called his son, and throwing off his royal robe, uncovered his breast, which had been eaten away by worms, and said to him: "Prince, behold how we die ! see how all the grandeur of this world ends !" Theodoret has truly said that death fears not riches, nor satellites, nor sovereigns; and that from princes as well as vassals rottenness and corruption flow (De Prov. S. 6).

Thus the dead, though they be princes, bring nothing with them to the grave: all their glory remains on the bed on which they expire. *When he shall die, he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him (Ps. xlviii, 18).*

St. Antonine relates, that after the death of Alexander the Great a certain philosopher exclaimed: "Behold! the man who yesterday trampled on the earth is now buried in the earth. Yesterday the whole earth was not sufficient for him, and now he is content with seven palms. Yesterday he led his armies through the earth, and now he is carried by a few porters to the grave." But it is better to listen to

the words of God. *Why, says the Holy Ghost, is earth and ashes proud ? (Ecclus. X, 9).*—O man ! do you not see that you are dust and ashes ? Why are you proud ? Why do you spend so many thoughts and so many years of life in seeking worldly greatness? Death will come; and then all your greatness and all your projects will be at an end. *In that day, says David, all their thoughts shall perish (Ps. cxiv, 4).*

Oh ! how much more happy was the death of St. Paul the Hermit, who lived sixty years shut up in a cave, than the death of Nero the Emperor of Rome! How much more happy was the death of St. Felix, a Capuchin lay-brother, than that of Henry the Eighth, who lived in the midst of royal magnificence, but at the same time at enmity with God ! But we must remember that, to secure a happy death, the Saints have abandoned all things; they have left their country; they have renounced the delights and the hopes which the world held out to them, and have embraced a life of poverty and contempt. But how can worldlings, living in the midst of sins, in the midst of earthly pleasures and dangerous occasions, expect a happy death ? God warns sinners that at death they shall seek and shall not find him (John vii, 34). He tells us that the hour of death shall be the time, not of mercy, but of vengeance (Deut. xxxii, 35). I will repay them in due time. Reason tells us the same; for, at death, men of the world shall find their understanding weak and darkened, and their heart hardened by the bad habits which they have contracted. Their temptations will then be more violent; how can they resist at death who were almost always accustomed to yield to temptations during life, and to be conquered by them? To change their heart a most powerful grace would be then necessary. But is God obliged to give them such a grace ? Have they merited such a grace by the scandalous and disorderly life which they have led? And on that last hour depends their

happiness or misery for eternity. How is it possible that he who reflects on this, and believes the truths of faith, does not leave all to give himself to God, who will judge us all according to our works.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Lord ! how many nights have I slept in enmity with Thee ? O God! in what a miserable state was my soul during that time. It was hated by Thee, and wished to be hated by Thee. I was condemned to hell: there was nothing wanting but the execution of the sentence. But Thou, my God. hast never ceased to seek after me, and to invite me to pardon. But, who can assure me that Thou hast pardoned me? Must I, O my Jesus ! live in this uncertainty till Thou judgest me? But the sorrow which I feel for having offended Thee, my desire to love Thee, and still more Thy Passion, O my beloved Redeemer, make me hope that Thy grace dwells in my soul. I am sorry for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love Thee above all things. I resolve to forfeit everything rather than lose Thy grace and Thy love. Thou wishest that the heart which seeks Thee should be full of joy. *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord (1 Par. xvi, 10).* Lord, I detest all the injuries I have offered to Thee. Give me courage and confidence : do not upbraid me with my ingratitude ; for I myself know and detest it. Thou hast said that Thou wilt not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live (Ezek. xxxiii, 11). Yes, my God, I leave all things and turn to Thee. I seek Thee, I desire Thee, I love Thee above all things. Give me Thy love; I ask nothing else. O Mary, thou, after Jesus, art my hope; obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

Let us Hasten to Give Ourselves to God.

David calls the happiness of this life a dream of one who awakes from sleep (Ps. lxxii, 20). In explaining these words, a certain author says: The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing: like a dream, which lasts but a little, and afterward vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time. The thought, that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The Saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the Empress Isabella to Grenada. When the coffin was opened, her appearance was so horrible and the smell so intolerable that all ran away. But St. Francis remained to contemplate in the dead body of his sovereign the vanity of the world; and looking at it, he exclaimed: "Are you then my empress ? Are you the queen before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone ? Thus then," he said within himself, "end the greatness and the crowns of this world. I will, therefore, henceforth serve a master who can never die." From that moment he consecrated himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a religious, should his wife die before him. This vow he afterward fulfilled by entering into the Society of Jesus.

Justly then has a person who was undeceived written on a skull these words: "*Cogitanti vilescunt omnia.*" To him who reflects on death, everything in this world appears contemptible; he cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world ? It is because they do not think of death. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart ? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying ? (Ps. iv, 3).* Miserable children of Adam, says the Holy Ghost, why do you not chase away from your heart so many earthly affections, which make you love vanity and lies ? What has happened to your forefathers must befall you. They have dwelt in the same

palace which you inhabit, and have slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, will be your lot. My brother, give yourself then to God before death comes upon you. *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: (Eccles. ix, 10)*. What you can do to-day, defer not till tomorrow; for a day once passed never returns, and tomorrow death may come, and prevent you from ever more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from everything which removes, or can remove, you from God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of this earth, before death strips us of them by force. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. (Apoc. xiv, 13)*. Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the good which they love, it unites them to the Supreme Good, who is the sole object of their affections, and who will render them happy for eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer. I thank Thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me had I died when I was at a distance from Thee? May Thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed ! I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. I did not then love Thee, and I cared but little to be loved by Thee. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that Thou hast already pardoned me. O my sweet Saviour, would that I had died a thousand times before I sinned against Thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend Thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths, rather than permit me evermore to lose Thy grace. I have been once

the slave of hell; but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul, Thou hast said that Thou lovest those who love Thee (Prov. viii, 17). I love Thee: then I am Thine, and Thou art mine. I may lose Thee at some future time ; but the grace which I ask of Thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose Thee again. Unasked, Thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces; I cannot now fear that Thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose Thee. Give me Thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope! intercede for me.

CONSIDERATION III.

Shortness of Life.

“What is your life ? It is a vapor, which appeareth for a little while.”

—James, iv. 15.

FIRST POINT.

Death Comes Quickly.

WHAT is your life? It is like a vapor, which is dissipated by a blast of wind, and is seen no more. All know that they must die; but the delusion of many is, that they imagine death as far off as if it were never to arrive. But Job tells us that the life of man is short. *Man born of a woman, living for a short time, . . . who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed* (This truth the Lord commanded Isaias to preach to the people. *Cry. . . . All flesh is grass. . . . Indeed, the people is grass. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen (Isa. xl, 6).* The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass ; death comes, the grass is dried up: behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and

of all worldly goods falls off.

My days, says Job, have been swifter than a post (Job, ix, 25). Death runs to meet us more swiftly than a post, and we at every moment run towards death. Every step, every breath brings us nearer to our end. "What I write," says Jerome, "is so much taken away from life (Ad Hel. De morte Nep.). "During the time I write, I draw near to death." *We all die, and like the waters that return no more, we fall into the earth (2 Kings, xiv, 14).* Behold how the stream flows to the sea, and the passing waters never return! Thus, my brother, your days pass by, and you approach death. Pleasures, amusements, pomps, praises, and acclamations pass away; and what remains ? And only the grave remaineth for me (Job, xviii, 1). We shall be thrown into a grave, and there we shall remain to rot, stripped of all things. At the hour of death the remembrance of the delights enjoyed, and of all the honors acquired in this life, will serve only to increase our pain and our diffidence of obtaining eternal salvation. Then the miserable worldling will say : " My house, my gardens, my fashionable furniture, my pictures, my garments, will in a little time be no longer mine, 'and only the grave remaineth for me."

Ah ! at that hour all earthly goods are viewed only with pain by those who have had an attachment for them. And this pain will serve only to increase the danger of their eternal salvation; for we see by experience, that persons attached to the world wish at death to speak only of their sickness, of the physicians to be called to attend them, and of the remedies which may restore their health. When any one speaks of the state of the soul, they soon grow weary, and beg to be allowed repose. They complain of headache, and say that it pains them to hear any one speak. And if they sometimes answer, they are confused, and know not what to say. It often happens that the

confessor gives them absolution, not because he knows that they are disposed for the sacrament, but because it is dangerous to defer it. Such is the death of those who think but little of death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God and Lord of infinite majesty ! I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I dishonored Thee by preferring to Thy grace a sordid pleasure, a little dust, the indulgence of anger, caprice, or vanity ! I adore and kiss, O my Redeemer, Thy holy wounds, which I have inflicted by my sins; but through these wounds I hope for pardon and salvation. Make me, O my Jesus ! understand the great injury I have done Thee in leaving Thee, the fountain of every good, to drink putrid and poisoned waters. Of all the offences I have given Thee nothing now remains but pain, remorse of conscience, and fruits for hell. *Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy child (Luke, xv, 21).* My Father! do not cast me off. It is true that I no longer merit the grace which would make me Thy child ; but *Thou hast* died to pardon me. *Thou hast* said : *Turn ye to me, . . . and I will turn to you (Zach., I, 3).* I give up all that gratifies me, I renounce all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I turn to Thee. Pardon me for the sake of the blood which has been shed for me; I repent with my whole heart of all the insults I have offered to Thee. I repent, and I love Thee above all things. I am not worthy to love Thee; but Thou dost not refuse the love of a heart that has once despised Thee. Thou didst purposely abstain from taking me out of life when I was in sin, that I might love Thee. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life, and I wish to love nothing but Thee. Assist me; give me holy perseverance, and Thy holy love. Mary, my refuge! recommend me to Jesus Christ.

SECOND POINT.

The Lighted Candle at Death.


King Ezechias said with tears: *My life is cut off as by a weaver; while I was yet beginning, he cut me off* (Isa., xxxviii, 12). Oh, how many have been overtaken and cut off by death, while they were executing and arranging worldly projects devised with so much labor! By the light of the last candle, all things in this world, applause, diversions, pomps, and greatness vanish. Great secret of death ! It makes us see what the lovers of this world do not see. The most princely fortunes, the most exalted dignities, and the most superb triumphs lose all their splendor when viewed from the bed of death. The ideas that we have formed of certain false happiness are then changed into indignation against our own folly. The black and gloomy shade of death then covers and obscures every dignity, even that of kings and princes.

At present, our passions make the goods of this earth appear different from what they are in reality. Death takes off the veil, and makes them appear what they really are—smoke, dirt, vanity, and wretchedness. O God ! of what use are riches, possessions, or kingdoms at death, when nothing remains but a wooden coffin, and a simple garment barely sufficient to cover the body? **Of what use are the honors, when they all end in a funeral procession and pompous obsequies, which will be unprofitable to the soul if it be in HELL?** Of what use is beauty, when after death nothing remains but worms, stench, and horror, and in the end a little fetid dust?

He hath made me, says Job, as it were a byword of the people, and an example before them (Job, xvii, 6). The rich man, the captain, the minister of state, dies: his

death is the general topic of conversation; but if he has led a bad life he will become "a byword of the people, and an example before them." As an instance of the vanity of the world, and even of the divine justice, he will serve for the admonition of others. After burial his body will be mingled with the bodies of the poor. *The small and great are there Job iii, 19*). What profit has he derived from the beautiful structure of his body, which is now but a heap of worms? Of what use are the power and authority which he wielded, when his body is now left to rot in a grave, and his soul has, perhaps, been sent to burn in hell? Oh, what misery! to be the occasion of such reflections to others, and not to have made them for his own profit! Let us then persuade ourselves that the proper time for repairing the disorders of the soul is not the hour of death, but the time of health. Let us hasten to do now what we shall not be able to do at that hour. *The time is short. (Tempus breve est)*. Everything soon passes away and comes to an end: let us therefore labor to employ all things for the attainment of eternal life

Affections and Prayers,

 God of my soul! O infinite goodness? have mercy on me, who have so grievously offended Thee. I knew that in yielding to sin I should lose Thy grace, and I have voluntarily lost it. Tell me what I must do in order to recover it. If Thou wishest me to repent of my sins, behold I repent of them with my whole heart: I wish to die of sorrow for them. If Thou wishest me to hope for Thy pardon, I hope for it through the merits of Thy blood. If Thou wishest me to love Thee above all things, I give up all. I renounce all the pleasures and goods which the world can give me: I love Thee above every good, O my most amiable Saviour! If Thou wishest me to ask Thy graces, I beg two graces from Thee—do not permit me ever more to offend Thee, and make me love Thee: treat

me then as Thou pleasest. Mary, my hope, obtain for me these two graces: through thy intercession I hope to obtain them.

THIRD POINT. Importance of the Last Moment.

How great, then, the folly of those who, for the miserable and transitory delights of this short life, expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, and afterward of an unhappy eternity. Oh! how important is that last moment, that last gasp, the last closing of the scene ! On it depends an eternity either of all delights or of all torments—a life of eternal happiness or of everlasting woe. Let us consider that Jesus Christ submitted to a cruel and ignominious death in order to obtain for us the grace of a good death. That we may at that last moment die in the grace of God, is the reason why he gives us so many calls, so many lights, and admonishes us by so many threats.

Antisthenes, though a pagan, being asked what was the greatest blessing which man could receive in this world, answered, *A good death*. And what will a Christian say, who knows by faith, that at the moment of death eternity begins, and that at that moment he lays hold of one of two wheels, which draws with it either eternal joy or everlasting torments ? If there were two tickets in a lottery, on one of which might be written **HELL** and on the other *Heaven*, what care would you not take to draw that which would give you a right to Paradise, and to avoid the other, by which you would win a place in Hell ! O God ! how the hands of those unhappy men tremble who are condemned to throw the die on which their life or death depends ! How great will be your terror at the approach of that last hour, when you will say : On this moment depends my life or death for eternity; on this depends

whether I shall be forever happy or forever in despair ! St. Bernardine of Sienna relates, that at death a certain prince exclaimed, with trembling and dismay: Behold, I have so many kingdoms and palaces in this world; but if I die this night I know not what apartment shall be assigned to me.

Brother, if you believe that you must die, that there is an eternity, that you can die only once, and that if you then err your error will be forever irreparable, why do you not resolve to begin at this moment to do all in your power to secure a good death ? St. Andrew Avellino said with trembling: "Who knows what will be my lot in the next life? Shall I be saved or damned ?" The thought of the uncertainty of being damned or saved filled St. Louis Bertrand with so much terror, that he could not sleep during the night, because of this thought which would suggest itself to him: "Who knows whether thou wilt be lost ?" And will not you, who have committed so many sins, tremble? Oh ! hasten to apply a remedy in time; resolve to give yourself sincerely to God, and begin from this moment a life which, at the hour of death, will be to you a source, not of affliction, but of consolation. Give yourself up to prayer, frequent the Sacraments, avoid all dangerous occasions, and, if necessary, leave the world, secure to yourself eternal salvation, and be persuaded that to secure eternal life no precaution can be too great.

Affections and Prayers.

O my dear Saviour! how great are my obligations to Thee! How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on so ungrateful a traitor as I have been ? Thou hast created me ; and in creating me Thou didst see the injuries which I would commit against Thee. Thou didst redeem me by dying for me: and then, too, Thou didst see the ingratitude which I would be guilty of toward Thee. Being placed in

the world I turned my back upon Thee by my sins. My soul was dead and rotten, and Thou didst restore me to life. I was blind, and Thou hast enlightened me. I had lost Thee, and Thou didst enable me to find Thee. I was Thy enemy, and Thou hast made me Thy friend. O God of mercy, make me feel the obligations which owe Thee, and make me weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee, Ah ! take vengeance on me by giving me a great sorrow for my sins. Do not chastise me by the privation of Thy grace and love. O eternal Father, I abhor and detest, above all evils, the injuries I have done Thee. Have mercy on me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Look at Thy Son dead on the cross. " Sanguis ejus super me." May his blood flow upon me, and wash my soul! O King of my heart! *Thy kingdom come*. I am resolved to banish every affection which is not for Thee. I love Thee above all things ; come and reign in my soul with undivided sway. Grant that I may love Thee, and love nothing but Thee. I desire to please Thee to the utmost of my ability, and to do Thy will in all things, during the remainder of my life. Bless, O my Father, this my desire, and grant me the grace to keep myself always united to Thee. All my affections I consecrate to Thee, and from this day forward I Wish to belong to Thee alone, my treasure, my peace, my hope, my love, my all. I hope for all graces through the merits of Thy Son. Mary, my queen and mother, assist me by thy intercession. Mother of God ! pray for me.

CONSIDERATION IV

The Certainty of Death.

"It is appointed unto men once to die."—*Hebr. ix. 27.*

FIRST POINT.

All Must Die.

THE sentence of death has been written against all men: you are a man; you must die. "Our other goods and evils," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain" (Serm.97, E.H.). It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be poor or rich, whether he will have good or bad health, whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says, "Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted ; but death cannot be resisted" (In Ps. cxxi). Belluacensis relates that at the end of his life a certain king of France said " Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one more hour for me." When the term of life arrives, it is not deferred a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed (Job,xiv, 5).*

Dearly beloved reader, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last for you. For me, who am now writing, and for you, who read this little book, has been decreed the day and the moment when I will no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death ? (Ps. lxxxviii, 49).* The sentence has been already passed. There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers, will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country: of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription, which only serves to teach us, that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust

inclosed in the tomb. "Tell me," says Saint Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world ? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms" (Medit. C. 3).

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure, not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here (if it were possible for a soul to be happy without God), if hereafter you must be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction; but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others; but death will come and reduce you to the level of the poorest peasant.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah ! unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold these years are already past: death is perhaps at hand ; and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, O my Lord! Fool that I have been ! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for heaven, I have laden my soul with debts to the divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment, which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, behold me, O my God! tell me what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee ? I am sorry for them, and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so. O God ; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so, but I have violated my promises. O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces

Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength ; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee ; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid, now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love ! Receive the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet—that loves Thee, and asks Thy mercy. I love Thee, O my Jesus; I love Thee with my whole heart; I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine ; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give me perseverance in obeying Thy commands ; give me Thy love ; and then do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. Mary, my mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself, to thee I consign my soul: pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

Every Moment we Approach Death.

I *t is appointed.* It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter round our neck ; every step we take brings us nearer to death. My brother, as your name has been one day entered in the register of baptisms, so it will be one day entered in the register of deaths. As in speaking of your ancestors you say: God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother, so others shall say the same of you. As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man on his way to the place of execution jesting, laughing, looking about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities,

and amusements? And are not you now on your way to death ? What is the object of your thoughts ? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives, on whom justice has already been executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions suspended on the gallows ! Look then at these dead bodies. Each of them says to you: *Yesterday for me; today for thee (Ecclus. xxxviii, 23)*. The same is said to you by the portraits of your deceased relatives, by the memoranda-books, the houses, the beds, the garments, which they have left.

To know that you must die, that after death you will enjoy eternal glory or suffer eternal torments, that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery, and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity those who meet with a Sudden and unprovided death ; why then do we not endeavor to be always prepared ? We too may die suddenly and without preparation. But, sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or do not think of it, we shall die ; and every hour, every moment, brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the last illness that will send us out of the world.

At every age, the houses, the streets, and the cities are filled with new people ; the former inhabitants are borne to the grave, their last resting-place. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come when neither I nor you, nor any one alive, will live any longer on this earth. *Days shall be formed and no one in them (Ps. cxxxviii, 16)*. We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights, or an eternal night of torments. There is no middle way ; it is certain and an article of faith, that either one lot or the other will be ours.

Affections and Prayers.

My beloved Redeemer! I would not dare to appear before Thee, did I not see Thee hanging on the cross, lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great; but Thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous ; but Thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy wounds, Thy blood, and Thy death are my hope. I deserved hell by my first sin: to that sin I have added so many other offences. And Thou hast not only preserved my life, but Thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that Thou wilt drive me away, now that I love Thee and desire nothing but Thy grace ? Yes, my dear Lord, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, and I am sorry for having despised Thee, not so much because I have deserved hell, as because I have offended Thee, my God, who hast loved me so tenderly. O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of Thy goodness; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to Thee : change my whole heart. Grant that my heart, which has once despised Thy love, and has exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely Thine, and may burn with continual flames for Thee. I hope to gain Paradise, that I may always love Thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent—I must remain among the penitents ; but though among these, I wish to love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy mercy, make all heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all Thine, and to think only of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and with Thy grace to execute this desire, which Thou in Thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary! thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to

this my promise.

THIRD POINT.

We should Think Continually of Death.

Death is certain. But, O God ! this truth Christians know, this they believe and see: and how can they still live so forgetful of death as if they would never have to die ? If after this life there were neither **hell** nor **heaven**, could they think less of it than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. My brother, if you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. *O death, thy sentence is welcome (Ecclus. Xli, 3)*. Oh! how correct the judgments, how well directed the actions, of the man whose judgments are formed, and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! " Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world" (Lign. Vit. De Hum. c. 4). *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John, ii, 16)*. All the goods of this earth *are reduced* to the pleasures of sense, to riches and to honors. But all these are easily despised by the man who considers that he will be soon reduced to ashes, and that he will be soon buried in the earth to be the food of worms.

And in reality it was at the sight of death that the Saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a skull, in order that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words, *Memento mori*. (*Remember death*.) The Venerable P. Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, "What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be." A holy hermit being asked when dying how he could be so

cheerful, said: "I have always kept death before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new in it."

What folly would it not be for a traveler, who would think only of acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he had to pass, and should reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land, where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool who seeks after happiness in this world, where he will remain only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next, where he must live for eternity ? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us: it is folly to set our heart on what we must soon quit. Death shall strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in a dying gasp, in a funeral, in a descent into the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the day of judgment; thence it will go to heaven or to hell, whither the souls will have gone before.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me. I shall then find only the little I have done for Thee, O my God ! and what do I wait for! Do I wait till death come and find me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity I should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus ; I will not die so discontented. I thank Thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities, and to love Thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good ! and I love Thee above all things—I love

Thee more than my life. My Jesus! I give myself entirely to Thee. From this moment I embrace and unite Thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to Thee. *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.* I will not wait to give it to Thee when that *proficiscere*, "Depart, O soul." will announce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask Thee to save me. "Jesu sis mihi Jesus." My Saviour, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of Thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration which I have read may be the last call which Thou wilt give me, and the last mercy which Thou wilt show me? Extend Thy hand, O my love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervor, and make me do with great love all that Thou dost demand of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee ardently, during the remainder of my life. O Mary! through the love which thou bearest to thy Jesus, obtain for me these two graces: perseverance and love.

CONSIDERATION V.

Uncertainty of the hour of Death.

"Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."—*Luke xii. 40.*

FIRST POINT.

The Moment is Fixed, but it is Unknown.

IT is certain that we shall die; but the time of death is uncertain "Nothing," says the author who styles himself *Idiota*, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death" (*De Cont. Mort. C. 3*). My brother, God has already fixed the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment when

I and you are to leave this earth and go into eternity; but the time is unknown to us. To exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death will come unawares, and like a thief in the night. *The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night (1 Thess. v. 2)*. He now tells us to be always vigilant; because, when we least expect him, he will come to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come (Luke xii, 40)*. St. Gregory says that, for our good, God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die. (Mort. 1, 12 c. 20). "Since, then," says St. Bernard, "death may take away life at all times and in all places, we ought, if we wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death" (Medit. C. 3).

All know that they must die: but the misfortune is, that many view death at such a distance, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly—some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so suddenly, and on that day on which he died. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin by saying, Tomorrow you will go to confession, let your answer be, How do I know but this will be the last day of my life ? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I would have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity? To how many poor sinners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin they were struck dead and sent to hell? *As fishes are*

taken with the hook, says Ecclesiastes, so men are taken in the evil time (Eccles. ix, 12). The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune will not happen to you; but you should say to him, in answer: If it should happen to me, what will become of me for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers.

Lord the place in which I ought to be at this moment is not that in which I find myself, but in hell, which I have so often merited by my sins. " *Infernus domus mea est.*" (*Hell is my house*). St. Peter says: *The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance (2 Peter iii, 9).* Then Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me, because Thou wishest me not to be lost, but return to Thee by repentance. My God, I return to Thee; least myself at Thy feet, and supplicate mercy *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.* Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended Thee after I had been favored with a special light. Other sinners also have offended Thee, but they have not received the light which Thou gavest to me. But, in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, Thou commandest me to repent of my sins, and to hope for pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of Thy Passion. Thou, my Jesus, though innocent, wished to die like a criminal on the cross, and to shed all Thy blood in order to wash away my sins. " *O sanguis innocentis lava, culpas poenitentis.*" O blood of the innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent. O eternal Father! pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear his prayers, now that He intercedes for me and makes himself my advocate. But it is not enough to receive pardon ; I desire also, O God ! worthy

of infinite love, the grace to love Thee : I love Thee, O Sovereign Good ! and I offer Thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous, but also venial offences. I will fly from all evil occasions. *Lead us not into temptation.* For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend Thee. *But deliver us from evil:* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as Thou pleasest. I accept all infirmities, pains, and losses which Thou mayest be pleased to send me: it is enough for me not to lose Thy grace and Thy love. *Ask, and you shall receive. (John, xvi, 24).* Thou promisest to grant whatsoever we ask ; I ask these two graces—holy perseverance and the gift of Thy love. O Mary, mother of mercy! thou dost pray for me: in thee do I put my trust.

SECOND POINT

We Should Make up Our Accounts.

The Lord does not wish us to be lost; and therefore, by the threat of chastisement, he unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. *Except you will be converted, He will brandish His sword (Ps. vii, 13).* Behold, he says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend me, have met with a sudden death, when they were least expecting it, and were living in peace, secure of a life of many years. *For when they shall say : Peace and security: then shall sudden destruction come upon them (1 Tess. v. 3).* Again he says: *Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish (Luke, xiii, 3).* Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance ? It is because he wishes that we amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. " He," says St. Augustine, " who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life." (Serm. 22 E.B.). It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day

of account arrives. Dearly beloved Christians, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night would your accounts be ready? Oh! how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or even another day, to prepare for judgment? Why then do you not now, that God gives you this time, settle the accounts of your conscience? Perhaps it cannot happen that this shall be the last day for you? *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee (Eccles. V. 8).* My brother, to save your soul you must give up sin. "If then you must renounce it at some time, why do you not abandon it at this moment?" says St. Augustine. Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives? But, for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon, but of vengeance. *In the time of vengeance He will destroy thee.*

When any one borrows from you a large sum of money you take care to get a written security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at stake, why do you not say: Who knows what may happen? If you were to lose a sum of money, all would not be lost; and though in losing it your entire property would be lost, you would have the hope of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you will truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself at enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my Redeemer ! Thou hast spent all Thy blood, and hast given Thy life in order to save my soul; and I have often lost it by confidence in Thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused Thy goodness to offend Thee. By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with Thee. Thou didst treat me with mercy, and I offended Thee; Thou didst seek after me, and I fled away from Thee ; Thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done., and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done Thee, and the obligation by which I am bound to love Thee. Ah! my Jesus! how could I be so dear to Thee, who sought after me so often when I chased Thee away ? How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given Thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardor of Thy desire to save me from perdition. I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, O infinite goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at Thy feet; receive it and bind it on Thy shoulders, that I may never more fly away from Thee. I will never again abandon Thee. I wish to love Thee; I wish to be Thine; and provided I belong to Thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me than to live without Thy grace, to be separated from Thee, who art my God, who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins! what have you done? You have made me displease my Saviour, who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for Thee. Thou hast died through love for me—I should die through sorrow for having despised Thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time Thou pleasest to send it. Hitherto I have not loved Thee, or I have loved Thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time, that I may love Thee before I die. Change my heart ; wound it; inflame it with Thy holy love. Through that

affection of charity which made Thee die for me, grant me this favor. I love Thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamored of Thee. Do not permit me to lose Thee. Give me holy perseverance; give me Thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my mother! perform the office of advocate in my behalf.

THIRD POINT

We Must Always be Ready.

Be ye ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes, it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to give ease to a troubled conscience. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then he will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of his graces. *Revenge is mine, I will repay (Rom. xii, 19)*. It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he was able to save his soul, will not be able when he is willing (De Lib. Arb. 1. 3, c. 13). But you will say: Perhaps I may still be converted and saved. Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, Perhaps I may not be drowned ? O God ! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason. When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is concerned, they speak like fools.

My brother, who knows but this point which you read is the last warning that God may send you ? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die (Serm. 39 E. B.). St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling (Phil. ii, 12). St.

Antonine relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, commanded him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread might give way filled him with so much terror that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at each moment fall upon us.

It is indeed a question of eternity. *If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place soever it shall fall, there shall it lie (Eccles. xi, 3).* If, when death comes, we are found in the grace of God, oh! with what joy shall we say: I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever. But, if death finds the soul in sin, with what despair will it exclaim, "Ergo erravimus !"—therefore have I erred; and for my error there will be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the venerable Father Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him: Oh! that I had a little more time to prepare for death ! This fear made the Abbot Agatho, who spent so many years in penance, say at death: What will become of me ? Who can know the judgments of God ? St. Arsenius, too, trembled at the hour of death; and being asked by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said: "My children this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said: *What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge ? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him ? (Job xxxi, 14).*

Affections and Prayers.

Ah my God! who has ever loved me more than Thou hast ? and whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted Thee ? O blood! O wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the wounds of Jesus; behold Thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking Thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator! of having offended Thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou didst create me that I might love Thee ; and I have lived as if Thou didst create me to offend Thee. For the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love Thee. I have hitherto resisted Thy will, but I will resist no longer, and will do whatsoever Thou commandest. Thou commandest me to detest the outrages I have offered Thee; behold, I detest them, with my whole heart. Thou commandest me to resolve to offend Thee no more ; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit Thy grace. Thou commandest me to love Thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love Thee, and I wish to love nothing else but Thee. Thou wilt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From Thee I ask, and from Thee I hope for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ, grant that I may be always faithful to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, with St. Bonaventure: " Unus est dilectus meus, unus est amor meus." My beloved is one, my love is one. I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving Thee displeasure ; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against Thee, and in loving Thee. Mary, my Mother! pray for all who recommend themselves to thee,—pray to Jesus also for me.

CONSIDERATION VI

The Death of the Sinner.

" When distress cometh upon them, they will seek for

peace, and there shall be none. Trouble shall come upon trouble."—Ezek. vii. 25.

FIRST POINT

The Sinner will Seek God at Death, but He will not find Him.

AT present sinners banish the remembrance and thought of death ; and thus they seek after peace, though they never find it, in the sinful life which they lead. But when they are found in the straits of death, on the point of entering into eternity, *they shall seek peace, and there shall be none.* Then they will not be able to fly from the torture of their sinful conscience. They will seek peace; but what peace can be found by a soul loaded with sins that sting it like so many vipers ? What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, whose law and friendship he has till then despised? Trouble shall come upon trouble. The news of death, which has been already announced, the thought of being obliged to take leave of everything in this world, the remorse of conscience, the time lost, the want of time at present, the rigor of the divine judgment, the unhappy eternity which awaits sinners—all these things will form a horrible tempest, which will confuse the mind, will increase his apprehensions; and thus, full of confusion and distrust, the dying sinner will pass to the other world. Trusting in the divine promise, Abraham, with great merit, hoped in God, against human hope (Rom. iv, 18). But sinners, with great demerit, hope falsely and to their own perdition, not only against hope but also against faith; because they despise the menaces of God against all who are obstinate in sin. They are afraid of a bad death, but they fear not to lead a wicked life. But who has assured them that they will not suddenly be deprived of life by a

thunderbolt, by apoplexy, or by the bursting of a blood-vessel ? And were they at death even allowed time for repentance, who assures them that they will sincerely return to God ? To conquer bad habits, St. Augustine had to fight against them for twelve years. How will the dying man, who has always lived in sin, be able, in the midst of the pains, the stupefaction, and the confusion of death, to repent sincerely of all his past iniquities ? I say *sincerely*, because it is not enough to say and to promise with the tongue: it is necessary to promise with the heart ? O God ! what terror and confusion will seize the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he finds himself overwhelmed with sins, with the fears of judgment, of **hell**, and of eternity ! Oh ! what confusion will these thoughts produce when the dying sinner will find his reason gone, his mind darkened, and his whole frame assailed by the pains of approaching death. He will make his confession; he will promise, weep, and seek mercy from God, but without understanding what he does; and in this tempest of agitation, of remorse, of pains and terrors, he will pass to the other life. *The people shall be troubled, and they shall pass (Job, xxxiv, 20)*. A certain author says that the prayers, the wailings, and promises of dying sinners are like the tears and promises of a man assailed by an enemy who points a dagger to his throat to take away his life. Miserable the man who takes to his bed at enmity with God, and passes from the bed of sickness to eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Wounds of Jesus! you are my hope. I should despair of the pardon of my sins, and of my eternal salvation, did I not behold you, the fountains of mercy and grace, through which a God has shed all his blood, to wash my soul from the sins which I have committed. I adore you, then, O holy wounds! and

trust in you. I detest a thousand times, and curse those vile pleasures by which I have displeased my Redeemer, and have miserably lost his friendship. Looking then at Thee, I raise up my hopes, and turn my affections to Thee. My dear Jesus, Thou deservest to be loved by all men, and to be loved with their whole heart. I have so grievously offended Thee, I have despised Thy love; but, notwithstanding my sinfulness, Thou hast borne with me so long, and invited me to pardon with so much mercy. Ah, my Saviour, do not permit me evermore to offend Thee, and to merit my own damnation. O, God ! what torture should I feel in **hell** at the sight of Thy blood and of the great mercies Thou hast shown me. I love Thee, and will always love Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Detach my heart from all love which is not for Thee, and confirm in me a true desire, a true resolution henceforth, to love only Thee, my sovereign good. O Mary, my Mother! draw me to God, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to him before I die.

SECOND POINT

Anguish of the Dying Sinner.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand, the devils will torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdition of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain it, and that if they lose it at death, they shall lose it forever. *The Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time (Apoc. xii, 12).* The dying man will be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils, who will labor for his damnation. *Their houses shall be filled with serpents (Isa. xiii, 21).* One will say: Fear not; you will recover. Another: You have been deaf to the

inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that he will have mercy on you ? Another will ask: How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbors ? Another: Do you not see that your confessions have been null, that they have been made without sorrow or a purpose of amendment ? How will you now be able to repair them ?

On the other hand, the dying man will see himself surrounded by his sins. *Evils*, says David, *shall catch the unjust man unto destruction (Ps. cxxxix, 12)*. These sins, says St. Bernard, like so many satellites, shall keep him in chains, and shall say unto him: " We are your works; we shall not desert you " (Medit. C. 2). We are your offspring; we will not leave you; we will accompany you to the other world, and will present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge. The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them, he must return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened, and his heart hardened. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it (Ecclus, iii, 27)*. St. Bernard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he will end his life in the same unhappy state. Having loved sin till death, he has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord will justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought; because what he will then do will be done through necessity (De vera poenit. c. 17).

Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls: *His heart shall be as hard as a stone and*

as firm as a smith's anvil (Job, xli, 15). Instead of yielding to the graces and inspirations of God, and being softened by them, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he will find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* Sinners, says the Lord, you have, for the love of creatures, turned your back upon me. *They have turned their back upon me, and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us. Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee (Jer. li, 27).* They will have recourse to God at death; but he will say to them: Why do you invoke me now? Call on creatures to assist you; for they have been your gods. The Lord will address them in this manner, because, in seeking him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and that he has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, will not die a good death (*Hoc teneo, hoc multiplici experientia didici, quod ei non bonus finis, cui mala semper vita fuit. – In Epis. Euseb. Ad Dam.*).

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Saviour! assist me ; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin, my passions attack me violently, my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at Thy feet; have pity on me and deliver me from so many evils. *In Thee, O Lord! I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever (Ps. xxx, 6).* Do not suffer a soul that trusts in Thee, to be lost. *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to Thee (Ps. lxxiii, 19).* I am sorry for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. I have done evil, I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if Thou dost not help me

by Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus! the rebel who has so grievously outraged Thy majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by Thy blood and Thy life. Through the merits then of Thy Passion and death, receive me into Thy arms, and give me holy perseverance. I was lost, Thou hast called me back: I will resist no longer: to Thee I consecrate myself; bind me to Thy love, and do not permit me evermore to lose Thee by losing Thy grace again. My Jesus! do not permit it. Mary, my queen ! do not permit it: obtain for me death, and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

THIRD POINT

We Must Seek God when we can Find Him.

It is a marvellous thing that God unceasingly threatens sinners with an unhappy death. *Then they shall call upon me, and I will not hear (Prov. 1, 28). Will God hear his cry when distress shall come upon him? (Job, xxvii, 9). I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock (Prov. i, 26).* According to St. Gregory, God laughs when he is unwilling to show mercy (Mor. 1, 9, c. 20). *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time: (Deut. xxii, 35).*

The Lord pronounces the same threats in so many other places: and sinners live in peace as securely as if God had certainly promised to give them, at death, pardon and paradise. It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted God promises to pardon him. But he has not promised that sinners will be converted at death: on the contrary, he has often protested that they who live in sin shall die in sin. *You shall die in your sins (John, viii, 21-24).* He has declared that they who seek him at death shall not find him. *You shall seek me, and shall not find me*

(John, vii, 34). We must, therefore, seek God while he may be found (Isa. iv, 6). A time shall come when it will not be in our power to find him. Poor blind sinners ! they put off their conversion till death, when there will be no more time for repentance. " The wicked," says Oleaster, "have never learned to do good unless when the time for doing good is no more." " God wills the salvation of all: but he takes vengeance on obstinate sinners. Should any man in a state of sin be seized with apoplexy and be deprived of his senses, what sentiments of compassion would be excited in all who should see him die without the sacraments and without signs of repentance ! And how great should be their delight, if he recovered the use of his senses, asked for absolution, and made acts of sorrow for his sins ! But is not he a fool who has time to repent and prefers to continue in sin? or who returns to sin, and exposes himself to the danger of being cut off by death without the sacraments, and without repentance ? A sudden death excites terror in all; and still how many expose themselves to the danger of dying suddenly, and of dying in sin ?

Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord (Prov. xvi, 11). We keep no account of the graces which God bestows upon us; but he keeps an account of them, he measures them; and when he sees them despised to a certain degree, he then abandons the sinner in his sin, and takes him out of life in that unhappy state. Miserable the man who defers his conversion till death. St. Augustine says: "The repentance which is sought from a sick man is infirm." (Serm. 255, E.B. App). St. Jerome teaches, that of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till death, scarcely one will be saved (In Ep. Eus. Ad Dam.) St. Vincent Ferrer writes that it is a greater miracle to bring such sinners to salvation, than to raise the dead to life (De Nat, V, S. 1).

What sorrow, what repentance, can be expected at death from the man who has loved sin till that moment? Bellarmine relates that when he exhorted to contrition a certain person whom he assisted at death, the dying man said that he did not know what was meant by contrition. The holy Bishop endeavored to explain it to him; but he said: *Father, I do not understand you; these things are too high for me.* He died in that state, leaving, as the venerable Cardinal has written, *sufficiently evident signs of his damnation.* St. Augustine says that by a just chastisement the sinner who has forgotten God during life shall forget himself at death (S. 257 E.B. App)

Be not deceived, says the Apostle, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption (Gal. vi, 7). It would be a mockery of God to live in contempt of his laws, and afterward to reap remuneration and eternal glory. But *God is not mocked.* What we sow in this life, we reap in the next. For him who sows the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, nothing remains but corruption, misery,, and eternal death.

Beloved Christian, what is said for others is also applicable to you. Tell me: if you were at the point of death, given over by the physicians, deprived of your senses, and in your last agony, with what fervor would you ask of God another month or week to settle the accounts: of your conscience ! God at present gives you this time: thank him for it, and apply an immediate remedy to the evil you have done; adopt all the means of finding yourself in the grace of God when death comes; for then there will be no more time to acquire his friendship.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! who would have borne with me so patiently

as Thou hast? If Thy goodness were not infinite, I would despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God who has died for my salvation. Thou commandest me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins terrify and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises encourage me. Thou hast promised the life of Thy grace to all who return to Thee. *Return ye and live (Ezek. xviii, 32)*. Thou hast promised to embrace him who is converted to Thee. *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you (Zach. I, 3)*. Thou hast said that Thou knowest not how to despise a contrite and humble heart (Ps. 1, 19). Behold me, O Lord; I return to Thee ; I acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells ; I am sorry for having offended Thee. I firmly promise never again to offend Thee voluntarily, and to love Thee forever. Ah ! do not suffer me any longer to be ungrateful to such unbounded goodness. O eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience Of Jesus Christ, who died to obey Thee, grant that I may till death be obedient to all Thy wishes. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good ! and through the love which I bear Thee, I desire to obey Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love; I ask nothing more. Mary, my Mother! intercede for me.

CONSIDERATION VII

Sentiments of a Dying Christian, who has been Careless about the Duties of Religion and has thought but little of Death.

" Take order with thy house; for thou shall die, and shall not live,"—/sa. xxxviii, 1.

FIRST POINT.

Sad State of the Worldling at Death.

IMAGINE yourself at the bedside of a negligent Christian, who is overpowered by sickness, and has but a few hours to live. Behold him oppressed by pains, by swoons, by suffocation, by want of breath, by cold perspirations, his reason so impaired, that he feels but little, understands little, and can speak but little. The greatest of all his miseries is, that though at the point of death, instead of thinking of his soul and of preparing accounts for eternity, he fixes all his thoughts on physicians, on the remedies by which he may be rescued from sickness, and from the pains which will soon put an end to life. "They are unable to have any other thought of themselves," (De Cont. Mundi, c. 15) says St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of the condition of negligent Christians at the hour of death. They can think only of themselves. Surely his relatives and friends will admonish the dying Christian of his danger? No; there is not one among all his relatives and friends who has the courage to announce to him the news of death, and to advise him to receive the last sacraments. Through fear of offending him, they all refuse to inform him of his danger.—O my God ! from this moment I thank Thee, that at death I shall, through Thy grace, be assisted by my beloved brothers of my Congregation, who will then have no other interest than that of my eternal salvation, and will all help me to die well.

But though he is not admonished of his approaching death, the poor sick man, seeing the family in disorder, the medical consultations repeated, the remedies multiplied, frequent, and violent, is filled with confusion and terror. Assaulted by fears, remorse, and distrust, he says within himself: Perhaps the end of my days has arrived. But what will be his feelings when he is told that death is at hand ? " Take order with thy house; for thou shall die, and shall not live." What pain will he feel in hearing these words : Your illness is mortal: it is necessary to receive

the last sacraments, to unite yourself to God, and to prepare to bid farewell to the world. What! exclaims the sick man; must I take leave of all—of my house, my villa, my relatives, friends, conversations, games, and amusements? Yes, you must take leave of all. The lawyer is already come, and writes this last farewell: *I bequeath such-a-thing and such-a-thing, etc.* And what does he take away with him? Nothing but a miserable rag, which will soon rot with him in the grave.

Oh! with what melancholy and agitation will the dying man be seized at the sight of the tears of the servants, at the silence of his friends, who have not courage to speak in his presence. But his greatest anguish will arise from the remorse of his conscience, which in that tempest will be rendered more sensible by the remembrance of the disorderly life he has until then led, in spite of so many calls and lights from God, of so many admonitions from spiritual Fathers, and of so many resolutions made, but never executed, or afterward neglected. He will then say: O unhappy me! I have had so many lights from God, so much time to tranquillize my conscience, and have not done so. Behold, I am now arrived at the gate of death. What would it have cost me to have avoided such an occasion of sin, to have broken off such a friendship, to have frequented the tribunal of penance? Ah, very little; but, though they had cost me much pain and labor, I ought to have submitted to every inconvenience in order to save my soul, which is of more importance to me than all the goods of this world. Oh! if I had put into execution the good resolutions which I made on such an occasion; if I had continued the good works which I began at such a time, how happy should I now feel! But these things I have not done, and now there is no more time to do them. The sentiments of dying sinners who have neglected the care of their souls during life, are like those of the damned who mourn in **hell** over their sins as the cause of their

sufferings, but mourn without fruit and without remedy.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord! if it were at this moment announced to me that my death was at hand, such would be the painful sentiments that would torture my soul. I thank Thee for giving me this light, and forgiving me time to enter into myself. O my God! I will no longer fly from Thee. Thou hast sought after me long enough. I have just reason to fear that Thou wilt abandon me, if I now refuse to give myself to Thee, and continue to resist Thy calls. Thou hast given me a heart to love Thee, and I have made so bad use of it. I have loved creatures and have not loved Thee, my Creator and Redeemer! who hast given Thy life for the love of me. Instead of loving Thee, how often have I offended, how often have I despised Thee, and turned my back upon Thee ? I knew that by such a sin I insulted Thee, and still I have committed it. My Jesus! I am sorry for all my sins; they displease me above all things. I wish to change my life. I renounce all the pleasures of the world in order to love and please Thee, O God of my soul ! Thou hast given me strong proofs of Thy love. I too would wish before death to give Thee some proof of my love. From this moment I accept all the infirmities, crosses, insults, and offences that I receive from men ; give me strength to submit to them with peace. I wish to bear them all for the love of Thee. I love Thee, O infinite goodness! I love Thee above every good. Increase my love, give me holy perseverance. Mary, my hope! pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

Desire of the Worldling: at Death.

Oh, how clearly are the truths of faith seen at the hour of

death ! But then they only serve to increase the anguish of the dying Christian who has led a bad life, particularly if he has been consecrated to God, and has had greater facilities for serving him, more time for exercises of piety, more good examples and more inspirations. O God ! what torture will he feel in thinking and saying: I have admonished others, and my life has been worse than theirs. I have left the world, and have cherished attachment to worldly pleasures and vanities. What remorse will he feel in thinking that with the lights which he had received from God a pagan would become a saint ! With what pain will his soul be racked when he remembers that he ridiculed in others certain practices of piety, as if they were weaknesses of mind; and that he praised certain worldly maxims of self-esteem, or of self-love, such as: It is necessary to seek our own advancement ; We ought to avoid suffering, and indulge in every amusement within our reach.


The desire of the wicked shall perish (Ps. cxi, 10). How ardently shall we desire at death the time which we now squander away ? In his dialogues, St. Gregory relates that a certain rich man, called Crisorius, who had led a wicked life, seeing at death the devils who came to carry him off, exclaimed: Give me time, give me time until tomorrow. They replied: O fool! do you now seek for time? You have had so much time, but have wasted it and have spent it in committing sin; and now you seek for time. Time is now no more. The unhappy man continued to cry out and call for assistance. To his son Maximus, a monk, who was present, he said: O my son, assist me ! O Maximus, come to my aid ! With his face on fire, he flung himself furiously from one side of the bed to the other; and in that state of agitation, screaming aloud, like one in despair, he breathed forth his unhappy soul.

Alas ! during this life, these fools love their folly; but at

death they open their eyes, and confess that they have been fools. But this only serves to increase their fear of repairing past evils ; and dying in this state, they leave their salvation very uncertain. My brother, now that you are reading this point, I imagine that you too say: This is indeed true. But if this is true, your folly and misfortune will be still greater, if after knowing these truths during life, you neglect to apply a remedy in time. This very point which you have read will be a sword of sorrow for you at death.

Since, then, you now have time to avoid a death so full of terror, begin instantly to repair the past; do not wait for that time in which you can make but little preparation for judgment. Do not wait for another month, nor for another week. Perhaps this light which God in his mercy gives you now may be the last light and the last call for you. It is folly to be unwilling to think of death, which is certain, and on which eternity depends; but it would be still greater folly to reflect on it, and not prepare for judgment. Make now the reflections and resolutions which you would then make; they may be made now with profit—then without fruit; now, with confidence of saving your soul—then, with diffidence as to your salvation. A gentleman who was about to take leave of the court of Charles the Fifth, to live only to God, was asked by the Emperor why he thought of quitting the court. The gentleman answered: To secure salvation, it is necessary that some time spent in penitential works should intervene between a disorderly life and death.

Affections and Prayers.

 my God ! I will no longer abuse Thy mercy. I thank Thee for the light Thou now givest me, and I promise to change my life. I see that Thou canst not bear with me any longer. I will not wait until Thou

either dost send me to **hell**, or dost abandon me to a wicked life, which would be a greater punishment than death itself. Behold, I cast myself at Thy feet; receive me into favor. I do not deserve Thy grace; but Thou hast said : *The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him in whatsoever day he shall turn from his wickedness (Ezek. xxxiii, 12)*. If then, O my Jesus! I have hitherto offended Thy infinite goodness, I now repent with my whole heart, and hope for pardon. I will say with St. Anselm : " Ah ! since Thou hast redeemed me by Thy blood, do not permit me to be lost on account of my sins." Look not on my ingratitude; but have regard to the love which made Thee die for me. If I have lost Thy grace. Thou hast not lost the power of restoring it to me. Have mercy on me then, O my dear Redeemer! Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee ; for I purpose henceforth to love nothing but Thee. Among; so many possible creatures. Thou hast chosen me to love Thee. I make choice of Thee, O Sovereign Good ! to love Thee above every good. Thou goest before me with Thy cross; I am willing to follow Thee with the cross which Thou wilt give me to carry. I embrace every mortification and every pain that comes from Thee. Do not deprive me of Thy grace, and I am content. Mary, my hope! obtain for me from God perseverance and the grace to love him ; and I ask nothing more.

THIRD POINT.

Tardy Regrets of a Dying Person.

The dying man who has neglected the salvation of his soul, will find thorns in everything that is presented to him—thorns in the remembrance of past amusements, rivalries overcome and pomps displayed; thorns in the friends who will visit him, and in whatever their presence shall bring before his mind; thorns in the spiritual Fathers who assist him in turn ;

thorns in the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, which he must receive; thorns even in the crucifix which is placed before him. In that sacred image he will read his want of correspondence to the love of a God who died for his salvation.

O fool that I have been ! the poor sick man will say, with the lights and opportunities that God has given me, I could have become a saint. I could have led a life of happiness in the grace of God; and after so many years that he gave me, what do I find but torments, distrust, fears, remorse of conscience and accounts to render to God ? I shall scarcely save my soul. And when will he say this ? When the oil in the lamp is on the point of being consumed, and the scene of this world *is* about to close forever; when he finds himself in view of two eternities, one happy, the other miserable; when he is near that last gasp on which depends his everlasting bliss or eternal despair, as long as God shall be God. What would he then give for another year, month, or even another week, with the perfect use of his faculties ? In the stupefaction, oppression of the chest, and difficulty of breathing, under which he then labors, he can do nothing; he is incapable of reflection, or of applying his mind to the performance of any good act: he is, as it were, shut up in a dark pit of confusion, where he can see nothing but the ruin which threatens him, and which he feels himself unable to avert. He would wish for time; but the assisting priest shall say to him, *Proficiscere*; adjust your accounts as well as you, can in the few moments that remain, and depart. Do you not know that death waits for no one, respects no one?

Oh ! with what dismay will he then think and say: This morning I am alive; this evening I shall probably be dead ! To-day I am in this room; to-morrow I shall be in the grave! and where will my soul be found? With what terror will he be seized when he sees the death candle

prepared ? When he hears his relatives ordered to withdraw from his apartment, and to return to it no more? When his sight begins to grow dim? Finally, how great will be his alarm and confusion when he sees that, because death is at hand, the candle is lighted? O candle, O candle, how many truths will you then unfold ! How different will you make things appear then from what they appear at present! O how clearly will you show the dying sinner that all the goods of this world are vanities, folly, and lies? But of what use is it to understand these truths when the time is past of profiting by them ?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! Thou wilt not my death, but that I be converted and live. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now, and I thank Thee for the light which Thou givest me at this moment. I know the error I have committed in preferring to Thy friendship the vile and miserable goods for which I have despised Thee. I repent, and am sorry with my whole heart for having done Thee so great an injury. Ah ! do not cease, during the remainder of my life, to assist me by Thy light and grace to know and to do all that I ought to do in order to amend my life. What shall it profit me to know these truths when I shall be deprived of the time in which they may be reduced to practice ? *Deliver not up to beasts the souls, that confess to Thee (Ps. lxxiii, 19).* When the devil tempts me to offend Thee again, ah! I entreat Thee, my Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion, to stretch forth Thy hand and to preserve me from falling into sin, and from becoming again the slave of my enemies. Grant that in all temptations I may have recourse to Thee, and that I may not cease to recommend myself to Thee as long as the temptations continue. Thy blood is my hope, and Thy goodness is my love. I love Thee, my God, worthy of infinite love; grant that I may always love Thee. Make

known to me the things from which I ought to detach my heart, that I may be entirely Thine: I wish to detach my heart from them : but give me strength to execute this desire. O Queen of heaven ! O Mother of God! pray for me, a sinner. Obtain for me the grace that in all temptations I may never omit to have recourse to Jesus and to thee, who, by thy intercession, preserves from falling into sin all who invoke thee.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

The Death of the Just.

" Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."— *Ps. cxv. 15.*

FIRST POINT.

The Death of the Just is a Rest.

VIEWED according to the senses, death excites fear and terror; but viewed with the eyes of faith, it is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror; but to the saints it is amiable and precious. "It is precious," says St. Bernard, "as the end of labors, the consummation of victory, the gate of life." (In Trans. Mal. s. 1). It is the end of toils and labor. *Man, says Job, born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries (Job, xiv, 1).* Behold a picture of our life: it is short and all full of miseries, of infirmities, of fears, and of passions. What, says Seneca, do worldlings, who desire a long life, seek, but a continuation of torments ? (Ep. ci). What, says St. Augustine, is a prolongation of life, but a prolongation of suffering? (Serm. 84, E.B.). Yes; for, as St. Ambrose tells us, the present life is given us, not for repose, but that we may labor, and by our toils merit eternal glory. (Serm. 42). Hence Tertullian has justly said,

that when God abridges life he abridges pain. Hence, though man has been condemned to death in punishment of sin, still the miseries of this life are so great, that, according to St. Ambrose, death appears to be a remedy and relief, rather than a chastisement (De Cain et Ab. I, 2, c. 10). God pronounces happy all who die in his grace, because they terminate their labors and go to repose. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors (Apoc. xiv, 13).*

The torments which afflict sinners at death do not disturb the peace of the Saints. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them (Wis. lii, 1).* That *proficiscere* which is so full of terror to worldlings does not alarm the Saints. The just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth, for he has always kept his heart detached from them. During life he has constantly said to the Lord: *Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever (Ps. lxxii, 26).* Happy you, said the Apostle to his disciples, who have been robbed of your goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. *You took with joy the being stripped of your goods, knowing that you had a better and a lasting substance (Heb. X, 34).* The Saint is not afflicted at bidding an eternal farewell to honors, for he always hated them, and considered them to be what they really are—smoke and vanity. He is not afflicted in leaving relatives, for he loved them only in God, and at death he recommends them to his heavenly Father, who loves them more than he does; and having a secure confidence of salvation, he expects to be better able to assist them from heaven than on this earth. In a word, he who has constantly said during life, *My God and my all,* continues to repeat it with greater consolation and greater tenderness at the hour of death.

He who dies loving God, is not disturbed by the pains of death; but, seeing that he is now at the end of life, and that he has no more time to suffer for God, or to offer him other proofs of his love, he accepts these pains with joy. With affection and peace he offers to God these last moments of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death to the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for him on the Cross to his eternal Father. Thus he dies happily, saying: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest (Ps. iv, 9)*. Oh ! how great the peace of the Christian who dies abandoned and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ, who has loved us to death, and has condescended to suffer so cruel a death in order to obtain for us a death full of sweetness and consolation.

Affections and Prayers.

O my beloved Jesus ! who, to obtain for me a happy death, hast freely submitted to so painful a death on Calvary, when shall I see Thee? The first time I shall behold Thee. I shall see Thee as my judge in the very place in which I shall expire. What shall I then say? What wilt Thou say to me? I will not wait till that moment to think of what I shall say; I will meditate on it now. I will say to Thee : My Redeemer ! Thou art the God who hast died for me. I have hitherto offended Thee; I have been ungrateful to Thee; I did not deserve pardon, but afterward, assisted by Thy grace, I have entered into myself, and, during the remainder of my life, I have bewailed my sins, and Thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me again, now that I am at Thy feet, and give me a general absolution of all my sins. I did not deserve ever again to love Thee, because I have despised Thy love; but Thou in Thy mercy hast drawn my heart to Thee, so that if I have not loved Thee as Thou deservest, I have at least loved Thee above all things, and have left all to please Thee. I see that Paradise and the possession of Thy divinity in Thy

kingdom is too much for me; but I cannot live at a distance from Thee, now, especially, after Thou hast shown me Thy amiable and beautiful countenance. I therefore ask for Paradise, not to enjoy greater delights, but to love Thee more perfectly. Send me to Purgatory as long as Thou pleasest. Defiled as I am at present, I do not wish to enter into the land of purity, and to see myself among those pure souls. Send me to be purified; but do not banish me forever from Thy presence. I shall be content to be one day, whenever Thou pleasest, called to Paradise to sing Thy mercies for all eternity. Ah. my beloved Judge ! raise Thy hand and bless me ; tell me that I am Thine, and that Thou art and shall be forever mine. I will always love Thee, and Thou wilt forever love me. Behold, I go to a distance from Thee; I go into fire: but I go in peace, because I go to love Thee, my Redeemer, my God, my all! I am content to go; but during my absence from Thee, I go, O Lord ! to count the moments that will elapse before Thou callest me. Have mercy on a soul that loves Thee with all its power, and that sighs to see Thee, that it may love Thee better.

This I hope, O my Jesus! to say to Thee at death. I entreat Thee to give me the grace to live in such a manner that I may then say to Thee what I have now thought. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. Assist me, O Mary! Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

The Death of the Just is a Victory.

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more (*Apoc. Xxi, 4*). Then, at death the Lord will wipe away from the eyes of his servants all the tears that they have shed in this world, where they live in the midst of pains, of fears, of

dangers, and of combats with hell. The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God will experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that it will soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God, to which it is exposed in this life, from so many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil. The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in continual danger of losing our souls and God. St. Ambrose says that in this life *we walk among snares* : we walk continually amid the snares of enemies, who lie in wait to deprive us of the life of grace. It was this danger that made St. Peter of Alcantara say at death to a religious who, in attending the Saint, accidentally touched him: "Brother, remove, remove from me; for I am still alive, and am still in danger of being lost." The thought of being freed by death from the danger of sin consoled St. Teresa, and made her rejoice as often as she heard the clock strike, that another hour of the combat was passed. Hence she would say: "In each moment of life I may sin and lose God." Hence, the news of approaching death filled the Saints with consolation; because they knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end, and that they would soon be in secure possession of that happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

It is related in the lives of the Fathers, that one of them who was very old, when dying, smiled while the others wept. Being asked why he smiled, he said: " Why do you weep at seeing me go to rest ?" (Lib. 5, l. 11, n. 52). Likewise St. Catharine of Sienna in her last moments said: "Rejoice with me; for I quit this land of pains, and go to a place of peace." If, says St. Cyprian, you lived in a house whose walls, and roof, and floors were tottering, and threatened destruction, how ardently would you desire to fly from it! In this life everything menaces the ruin of the soul; the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses,

all draw us to sin and eternal death. *Who*, exclaimed the Apostle, *shall deliver me from the body of this death ? (Rom. vii, 24)*. Oh ! how great will be the joy of the soul in hearing these words: "Come, my spouse, depart from that land of tears, from the dens of lions who seek to devour you, and to rob you of the divine grace." (Cant. iv, 8). Hence, St. Paul, sighing for death said that Jesus Christ was his only life; and therefore he esteemed death his greatest gain, because by death he acquired that life which never ends. *To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Phil. 1, 21)*.

In taking a soul while it is in the state of grace out of this world, where it may change its will and lose his friendship, God bestows on it a great favor. *He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding (Wis. iv, 11)*. Happy in this life is the man that lives in union with God; but, as the sailor is not secure until he has arrived at the port and escaped the tempest, so the soul cannot enjoy complete happiness until it has left this world in the grace of God. "Praise," says St. Maximus, "the felicity of the sailor: but not until he has reached the port" (In Nativ. D. Eus. hom. 2). Now, if at his approach to the port the sailor rejoices, how much greater ought to be the joy and gladness of a Christian who is at the point of securing eternal salvation ?

Moreover, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial sins. *For*, says the Holy Ghost, *a just man shall fall seven times (Prov. xxiv, 16)*. He who quits this life ceases to offend God. "For," says St. Ambrose, "what is death but the burial of vices?" (De Bon. Mort. c. 4). This consideration makes the souls that love God long for death. The Venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself at death, saying: "By ceasing to live, I cease forever to offend God." And St. Ambrose said: "Why do we desire this life, in which, the longer we live, the more we are

loaded with sins?" (Ibid. c. 2). He who dies in the grace of God can never more offend him, says the same holy doctor (In Ps. cxviii, s. 18). Hence, the Lord praises the dead more than any man living, though he be a saint (Eccles. iv, 2). A certain spiritual man gave directions that the person who should bring him the news of death, should say: "Console yourself; for the time has arrived when you will no longer offend God."

Affections and Prayers.

Into Thy hands, I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth. (Ps. xxx, 6).

Ah, my sweet Redeemer! what should become of me If Thou hadst deprived me of life when I was far from Thee? I should now be in **hell**, where I could never love Thee. I thank Thee for not having abandoned me, and for having bestowed on me so many great graces in order to gain my heart. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee above all things. Ah ! I entreat Thee to make me always sensible of the evil I have done in despising Thee, and of the love which Thy infinite goodness merits. I love Thee; and I desire to die soon, if such be Thy will, that I may be freed from the danger of ever again losing Thy grace, and that I may be secure of loving Thee forever. Ah, my beloved Jesus! during these remaining years of my life, give me strength to do something for Thee before I die. Give me strength against all temptations, and against my passions, but particularly against the passion which has hitherto most violently drawn me to sin. Give me patience in all infirmities, and under all the injuries which I may receive from men. I now, for the love of Thee, pardon all who have shown me any contempt, and I beg of Thee to bestow upon them the graces which they stand in need of. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial faults, about which I have been hitherto negligent. My Saviour! assist me. I hope for all

graces through Thy merits. O Mary, my Mother, and my hope! I place unbounded confidence in thee.

THIRD POINT.

The Death of the Just is the Entrance to Life.

Death is not only the end of labors, but it is also the gate of life, says St. Bernard . He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through this gate. *This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter into it (Ps. cxvii, 20).* St. Jerome entered death to open its gates to him. " Death, my sister, if you do not open the door to me, I cannot enter to enjoy my Lord." (In Ep. Eus. ad Dam.). Seeing in his house a picture which represented a skeleton with a scythe in the hand, St. Charles Borromeo sent for a painter, and ordered him to erase the scythe, and to paint a golden key, in order that he might be more and more inflamed with a desire of death, which opens Paradise, and admits us to the vision of God.

If, says St. John Chrysostom, a king had prepared for one of his subjects apartments in his own palace, but for the present obliged him to live in a tent, how ardently would the vassal sigh for the day on which he should leave the tent to enter into the palace ! In this life the soul, being in the body, is as it were confined in a prison, which it must leave in order to enter the celestial palace. Hence, David prayed to the Lord to bring his soul out of prison (Ps. cxli, 8). When the holy Simeon held the infant Jesus in his arms, he asked no other grace than to be delivered from the prison of the present life. " Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord." (Luke ii, 29). "As if detained by necessity, he," says St. Ambrose, "begs to be dismissed." The Apostle desired the same grace when he said : *I am straitened, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ (Phil. I, 23).*

How great was the joy of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh when he heard from Joseph that he should soon be rescued from the prison and restored to his situation ! And will not a soul that loves God exult with gladness at hearing that it will soon be released from the prison of this earth, and go to enjoy God ? *"While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord."* (2 Cor. v. 6). While the soul is united to the body, it is at a distance from the vision of God, as if in a strange land, and excluded from its true country. Hence, according to St. Bruno, the departure of the soul from the body should not be called death, but the beginning of life." (De Virginit.).

Hence, the death of the Saints is called their birthday; because at death they are born to that life of bliss which will never end. St. Athanasius says: "To the just, death is only a passage to eternal life." "O amiable death," says St. Augustins, " who will not desire thee, who art the end of evils, the close of toils, the beginning of everlasting repose ?" (De Vis. inf., l. 1, c. 6). Hence the holy Doctor frequently prayed for death, that he might see God.

The sinner, as St. Cyprian says, has just reason to fear death ; because he will pass from temporal to eternal death (De Mortal.). But he who is in the state of grace, and hopes to pass from death to life, fears not death. In the life of St. John the Almoner, we read that a certain rich man recommended to the prayers of the Saint an only son, and gave the Saint a large sum of money to be distributed in alms, for the purpose of obtaining from God a long life for his son. The son died soon after; but when the father complained of his death, God sent an Angel to say to him: "You sought for your son a long life: he now enjoys eternal life in heaven." This is, as was promised by the Prophet Osee, the grace which Jesus Christ merited for us. *O death, I shall be thy death (Osee, xiii, 41).* By

dying for us, Jesus has changed death into life. When Pionius, the Martyr, was brought to the stake, he was asked by those who conducted him, how he could go to death with so much joy. "You err," replied the Saint: "I go not to death, but to life." (Ap Eus. 1, iv, c. 14). Thus, also, the mother of the youthful St. Symphorian exhorted him to martyrdom. "My son," said she, "life is not taken away from you; it is only exchanged for a better one."

Affections and Prayers.

God of my soul! I have hitherto dishonored Thee by turning my back upon Thee; but Thy Son has honored Thee by offering to Thee the sacrifice of his life on the cross. Through the honor which Thy beloved Son has given Thee, pardon the dishonor which I have done Thee. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good ! for having offended Thee ; and I promise henceforth to love nothing but Thee. From Thee I hope for salvation : whatever good is in me at present is the fruit of Thy grace; to Thee I ascribe it all. *By the grace of God, I am what I am (1 Cor. xv, 10)*. If I have hitherto dishonored Thee, I hope to honor Thee for eternity by blessing and praising Thy mercy forever. I feel a great desire to love Thee. This Thou hast given me: I thank Thee for it, O my love ! Continue, continue the aid which Thou hast begun to give me. I hope to be henceforth Thine, and entirely Thine. And what greater pleasure can I enjoy than that of pleasing Thee, my Lord ! who art so amiable, and who hast loved me so tenderly! O my God! I ask only love, love, love; and hope always to ask of Thee, love, love, until, dying in Thy love, I reach the kingdom of love, where, without evermore asking it, I shall be full of love, and never for a single moment cease to love Thee for all eternity, and with all my strength. Mary, my mother! who lovest thy God so intensely, and who desirest so vehemently to see him loved, obtain for me the grace to love him ardently in this

life, that I may love him ardently forever in the next.

CONSIDERATION IX.

Peace of the Just at the Hour Death.

" The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die ; but they are in peace."—*Wis. iii. 1, etc.*

FIRST POINT.

The Just have nothing to fear at the Hour of Death.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. If God holds fast in his hands the souls of the just, who can snatch them from him ? It is true that hell does not cease to tempt and attack even the Saints at the hour of death; but it also true that God does not cease to assist, and to multiply helps to his faithful servants, whenever their danger is increased. *There, says St. Ambrose, There is greater aid, where there is greater peril, because God is a helper in due time (De Jos. patr.. c. 5).* David also assures us in the Psalms : *A helper in time of tribulation (Ps. ix, 10).* The servant of Eliseus was struck with terror when he saw the city encompassed with enemies; but the Saint inspired him with courage, saying: *Fear not: for there are more with us than with them (4 Kings, vi, 16).* He then showed him an army of Angels sent by God to defend the city. The devil will come to tempt the dying Christian; but his angel-guardian will come to strengthen him: his holy advocates will come—St. Michael, whom God has appointed to defend his faithful servants in their last combat with hell, will come; the divine Mother will come to chase away the devils, and to: protect her

servant; above all, Jesus Christ will come to: guard against every temptation of hell, the innocent or penitent sheep for whose salvation he has given his life. He will give that confidence and strength of which the soul shall stand in need in that last struggle with its enemies. Hence, full of courage, it will say: *The Lord became my helper (Ps. xxix, 11). The Lord is my light and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ? (Ps. xxvi, 1).* God, says Origen, is more solicitous for our salvation than the devil is for our perdition; for the Lord loves our souls far more than the devil hates them (In Num. Hom. 20). God is faithful, says the Apostle; he does not permit us to be tempted above our strength (1 Cor. x, 13). But you will say: Many Saints have died with great fear of being lost, I answer: We have but few examples of persons who, after leading a holy life, died with fears for their eternal salvation. Belluacensis says that, to purify them at the hour of death from some defect, God sometimes permits holy souls to be disturbed by such fears (Spec. mor. 1, 2; p. 1, d. 3). But generally the servants of God have died with a joyful countenance. At death the judgment of God excites fear in all; but if sinners pass from terror to despair, the Saints rise from fear to confidence, St. Antonine relates that in a severe illness, St. Bernard trembled through fear of judgment, and was tempted to despair. But thinking of the merits of Jesus Christ, he drove away all fear, saying to his Saviour: Thy wounds are my merits. St. Hilarion also was seized with fear; but he said: "Go forth, my soul; what do you fear? For near seventy years you have served Christ; and are you now afraid of death?" As if he said: My soul, what do you fear? have you not served a God who is faithful, and knows not how to abandon at death the Christian who has been faithful to him during life? Father Joseph Scamacca, of the Society of Jesus, being asked if in dying he felt confidence in God, said: "Have I served Mahomet, that I should now doubt of the goodness of my God, or of his desire to save me?"

Should the thought of having offended God at some time of our life molest us at death, let us remember that he has protested that he forgets the iniquities of all penitent sinners. *If the wicked do penance,—I will not remember all his iniquities (Ezek. xviii, 21).* But you may ask: How can I be secure of having received pardon from God? St. Basil asks the same question: "How can any one be certain that God has forgiven his sins?" "He can be certain of pardon," answers the Saint, "if he say: I have hated and abhorred iniquity." (Reg. brev. interr. 12). He who detests sin, can rest secure of having obtained pardon from God. The heart of man cannot exist without loving some object; it must love creatures or God. If it loves not creatures, it loves God. And who are they that love God? All who observe his commands. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me (John, xiv, 21).* He then who dies in the observance of the commandments, dies in the love of God; and he that loves fears not. *Charity casteth out fear (1 John, iv, 18).*

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! when will the day arrive on which I can say: My God! I can never lose Thee? When shall I see Thee face to face, and be sure of loving Thee with all my strength for eternity? Ah, my Sovereign Good, my only love! as long as I have life, I shall be in danger of offending Thee and of losing Thy grace. There has been an unhappy time when I did not love Thee, but, on the contrary, despised Thy love. I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and desire to do all in my power to love and please Thee. But I am still in danger of refusing Thee my love, and of again turning my back upon Thee. Ah, my Jesus, my life and my treasure! do not permit it. Should this misfortune ever happen to

me, take me this moment out of life by the most cruel of deaths; I am content to suffer such a death, and I entreat Thee to send me such a death, sooner than permit me ever to cease to love Thee. Eternal Father! for the love of Jesus Christ, do not abandon me to so great an evil. Chastise me as Thou wishest, I deserve and accept any chastisement Thou pleasest to inflict upon me: but preserve me from the punishment of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and of Thy love. My Jesus! recommend me to Thy Father. Mary, my Mother ! recommend me to thy Son ; obtain for me perseverance in his friendship, and the grace to love him; and then do with me what thou pleasest.

SECOND POINT.

The Just Die in a Sweet Peace.

T*he souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; . . . but they are in peace (Wis. iii, 1).* In the eyes of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, in sorrow and with reluctance. But God knows well how to console his children in their last moments; and even in the midst of the pains of death he infuses into their souls certain sweetnesses, as foretastes of Paradise, which he will soon bestow upon them. As they who die in sin begin to experience on the bed of death certain foretastes of hell, certain remorse, terrors, and fits of despair; so, on the other hand, the Saints, by the frequent acts of divine love which they then make, by their ardent desire and firm hope of soon possessing God, begin to feel that peace which they will afterwards fully enjoy in heaven. To the Saints death is not a punishment, but a reward. *When He shall give sleep to His beloved, behold the inheritance of the Lord (Ps. cxxvi, 2).* The death of the Christian that

loves God is called, not death, but sleep, thus he shall be able to say less, *In peace in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest (Ps. iv, 9).*

Father Suarez died with so much peace, that in his last moments he exclaimed: "I could never imagine that death would be so sweet." When Cardinal Baronius was advised by his physician not to fix his thoughts so much on death, he said: "Perhaps you think I am afraid of death. I fear it not; but, on the contrary, I love it." In going to death for the faith, the Cardinal of Rochester, as Saunders relates, put on his best clothes, saying that he was going to a nuptial feast. Hence at the sight of the scaffold he threw away his staff, and said: "O my feet! walk fast; we are not far from Paradise." Before death he intoned the "Te Deum," to thank God for giving him the grace to die a martyr for the holy faith ; and, full of joy, he laid his head on the block. St. Francis of Assisi began to sing at the hour of death, and invited the brethren to join him. Brother Elias said to him : "Father, at death we ought rather to weep than to sing." "But," replied the Saint, "I cannot abstain from singing; for I see that I shall soon go to enjoy my God." A young nun of the order of St. Teresa, in her last illness said to her sisters in religion who stood round her bed bathed in tears : " O God ! why do you weep ? I go to enjoy my Jesus. If you love me, rejoice with me."

Father Granada relates that a certain sportsman found a solitary infected with leprosy, singing in his last agony. "How," said the sportsman, "can you sing in such a state?" "Brother," replied the hermit, "between me and God there is nothing but the wall of this body. I now see that my flesh is falling off—that the prison will soon be destroyed, and that I shall go to see my God. It is for this reason that I rejoice and sing." The desire of seeing God made St. Ignatius the Martyr say that if the wild beasts should not

take away his life he would provoke them to devour him. St. Catharine of Genoa could not bear to hear death called a misfortune. Hence she would say : "Oh ! beloved death, in what a mistaken light are you viewed ! Why do you not come to me ? I call on you night and day." St. Teresa desired death so vehemently that she regarded the continuation of life as death : hence she composed the celebrated hymn, *I die because I do not die*. Such is death to the Saints.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my supreme good, my God ! if for the past I have not loved Thee, I now turn to Thee with my whole soul. I take leave of all creatures, and choose Thee, my most amiable Lord ! for the sole object of my love. Tell me what Thou wishest from me: I will do all Thou desirest. I have offended Thee enough I wish to spend all the remaining moments of life in pleasing Thee. Give me grace to compensate by my love my past ingratitude, which has continued to this moment. I deserve to burn in the fire of **hell** for so many years; Thou hast sought after me, and hast drawn me to Thyself. Make me now burn with the fire of Thy holy love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness ! Thou justly claimest all the affections of my heart; for Thou hast loved me more than all others have loved me. Thou alone deservest my love; Thou only do I wish to love. I desire to do everything in my power to please Thee. Do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. For me it is enough to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. Mary, my Mother! assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

The Just in Dying have a Foretaste of Celestial Joy.

And how can he fear death, says St. Cyprian, who hopes to receive a kingly crown in Paradise! " Let us not be afraid to be put to death when we are certain that we shall be crowned after death" (Epis. Ad Thibar.). How can he fear death when he knows that by dying in the state of grace his body will become immortal ? *This mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. xv, 55)*. He that loves God and desires to see him, regards life as a punishment and death as a source of joy, says St. Augustine. And St. Thomas of Villanova says that death, if it finds a man sleeping, comes like a thief, robs him, kills him, and casts him into the pit of **hell**. But if it finds him watching, it comes as an ambassador from God, and salutes him, saying: " The Lord expects you to the nuptial feast: come ; I will conduct you to the happy kingdom for which you sigh."

Oh ! with joy does he expect death who finds himself in the grace of God, and hopes soon to see Jesus Christ, and to hear from him these consoling words: *Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many (Matt. xxv, 21)*. Oh, what consolation will he then receive from his works of penance, his prayers, his detachment from earthly goods, and from all he has done for God ! *Say to the just man, that it is well; for he shall eat the fruit of his doings (Isa. iii, 10)*. Then he who has loved God will taste the fruit of all his holy works. Hence, in hearing that a religious, his friend, died in sentiments of fervent piety, Father Hypopolitus Durazzo, of the Society of Jesus, wept not, but exulted with joy and gladness. But, says St. John Chrysostom, would it not be most unreasonable to believe that heaven is eternal, and to pity those who go to that kingdom of delights? (Ad Vid. jun. tr. 1). What special consolation will the just man receive at the hour of death from the devotions performed in honor of the Mother of God, from the **Rosaries** he has recited, from his visits to

her image, from his fasts on Saturdays, from his frequent attendance at her Confraternities ! Mary is called the faithful Virgin, Oh, how great is her fidelity in consoling her faithful servants at the hour of death! A certain person devoted to the Most Holy Virgin said in his last moments to Father Binetti: " Father, you cannot conceive the consolation which the thought of having served Mary infuses at the hour of death. O my Father! if you knew the happiness I feel on account of having served this Mother. I am not able to express it." How great will be the joy of him who has loved Jesus Christ—who has often visited him in the **Most Adorable Sacrament**, and has often received him in the **Holy Communion**, when he sees his Lord entering his room in the **Most Holy Viaticum**, and coming to accompany him in his passage to eternity! Happy he who will then be able, with St. Philip Neri, to say to his Saviour: " Behold my love! Behold my love ! Give me my love."

But you will, perhaps, say: Who knows what shall be my lot ? Who knows but I shall die an unhappy death? Of you who speak in this manner, I ask what is it that causes a bad death ? Nothing but sin. We should then fear sin only, and not death. "It is clear," says St. Ambrose, " that it is not death that is bitter, but sin; our fears ought not to be of death, but of life" (De bon. Mort. C. 8). If, then, you desire not to fear death, lead a holy life. *With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end (Eccles. 1, 13).*

Father Saint Colombiere held it to be morally impossible that the man who has been faithful to God during life should die a bad death. And before him, St Augustine said: " He who has lived well cannot die badly. He who is prepared to die fears no death, however sudden." (De Disc. chr., c. 12). *The just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest (Wis. iv, 7).* Since we cannot go to

enjoy God without passing through death, St. John Chrysostom exhorts us to offer to God what we are obliged to give him (Op. imp. In Matth. Hom. 25). And let us be persuaded that they who offer their death to God, make the most perfect act of divine love which it is in their power to perform; because, by cheerfully embracing that kind of death which God is pleased to send, and at the time and in the manner in which God sends it, they render themselves like the holy martyrs. He who loves God should desire and sigh after death; because it unites him forever to God, and delivers him from the danger of losing God. He who does not desire to see God speedily, and to be secure against the possibility of ever losing God, shows that he has but little love for God. Let us, during life, love him to the utmost of our power. We should make use of life only to advance in divine love: the measure of our love of God at death will be the measure of our love for him in a happy eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Ay Jesus! bind me to Thyself so that I may never more be separated from Thee. Make me entirely Thine before I die, that I may see Thee appeased, O my Redeemer! the first time I behold Thee. Thou didst seek after me when I fled away from Thee : ah! do not cast me off, now that I seek after Thee. Pardon me all the offences I have given Thee. From this day I will think only of serving and loving Thee. Thou hast laid me under too many obligations; Thou hast not refused to give Thy blood and Thy life for the love of me. I would wish to be entirely consumed for the love of Thee. O God of my soul! I wish to love Thee ardently in this life, that I may love Thee ardently in the next. Eternal Father! draw my whole heart to Thee: detach it from earthly affections: wound and inflame my whole soul with Thy holy love. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, hear my prayers. Give me holy

perseverance, and grant me the grace always to ask it of Thee. Mary, my Mother! assist me, and obtain for me the grace to ask unceasingly of thy Son the gift of holy perseverance.

CONSIDERATION X.

Means of preparing for Death.

"Remember thy last end, and thou shall never sin."—*Eccl. vii, 40.*

FIRST POINT.

Not to Wait till the Last Moment.

ALL confess that they must die, and die only once, and that nothing is of greater importance than to die well ; because on death depends whether we shall be forever in bliss or forever in despair. All know that our eternal happiness or our eternal unhappiness depends on leading a good or a bad life. How then does it happen that the greater part of Christians live as if they were never to die, or as if to die well or ill were of little moment! They live in sin because they do not think of death. *Remember thy last end, and thou shall never sin (Ecclus. Vii, 40).* We must be persuaded that the hour of death is not fit for settling the accounts of the soul, and securing the great affair of eternal salvation. In worldly matters prudent men take measures in due time to secure temporal gain—to obtain a situation of emolument. To preserve or restore bodily health the necessary remedies are not deferred a single moment. What would you say of the man who should put off his preparation for a trial on which his life depended till the day of trial arrived? Would you not stigmatize as a fool the general who should not begin to lay in a supply of provisions and arms till the city

is besieged ? Would it not be folly in a pilot to neglect till the time of the tempest, to provide the vessel with an anchor and a helm? Such precisely is the folly of the Christian who neglects to tranquillize his conscience till death arrives.

When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction, as a tempest, then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear. . . . Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way," (Prov. I, 27). The time of death is a time of storm and confusion. At that awful hour sinners call on God for assistance; but they invoke his aid through the fear of hell, which they see at hand, and not with true contrition of heart. It is for this reason that God is deaf to their cry ; it is for this reason also that they will then taste the fruit of their wicked life. What they have sown they shall reap (Gal. vi, 8). Ah ! it will not then be enough to receive the Sacraments ; it is necessary at death to hate sin, and to love God above all things. But how can he, then, hate forbidden pleasures, who has loved them till that moment? How can he love God above all things, who has till then loved creatures more than he has loved God ?

The Lord called the virgins foolish who wished to prepare their lamps when the bridegroom was nigh. All have a horror of a sudden death, because there is no time to settle the accounts of conscience. All confess that the Saints have been truly wise, because they prepared for death during life. And what are we doing? Shall we expose ourselves to the danger of preparing for death when it arrives? We ought to do at present what we shall then wish to have done. Oh ! what pain will then arise from the remembrance of time lost, and still more from the remembrance of time spent in sin : time given by God to merit eternal life ; but now past, and never to return! What anguish will the sinner feel when he shall be told : You can be steward no longer! (Luke, xvi, 2). There is no

more time for doing penance, for frequenting the sacraments, for hearing sermons, for visiting Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament, or for prayer. What is done is done. To make a good confession, to remove several grievous scruples, and thus tranquillize the conscience, would require a better state of mind and time more free from confusion and agitation. But time will be no more (Apoc. X, 6).

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! had I died on one of the nights known to Thee, where should I be at present ? I thank Thee for having waited for me; I thank Thee for all those moments which I should have spent in **hell** from the first moment that I offended Thee. Ah! give me light, and make me sensible of the great evil I have done Thee in voluntarily losing Thy grace, which Thou didst merit for me by the sacrifice of Thy life on the cross. Ah ! my Jesus, pardon me : I am sorry from the bottom of my heart, and above all things, for having despised Thee, who art infinite goodness. Ah! assist me, O my Saviour! that I may never lose Thee again. Alas, my Lord! if I return again to sin, after so many lights and graces which Thou hast bestowed upon me, I should deserve a **hell** to be made on purpose for myself. Through the merits of that blood which Thou hast shed for my sake, do not permit me ever more to offend Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. I love Thee, and I will never cease to love Thee till death. My God, have mercy on me for the love of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my hope! do thou too have pity on me; recommend me to God: thy recommendations are never rejected by that God who loves thee so tenderly.

SECOND POINT.

Put Our Conscience in a Good State, and Regulate Our

Lives.

Brother, since it is certain that you will die, go as soon as possible to the foot of the crucifix; thank your crucified Redeemer for the time which in his mercy he gives you to settle the affairs of your conscience; and then review all the irregularities of your past life, particularly of your youth. Cast a glance at the commandments of God: examine yourself on the duties of the State of life in which you have lived, and on the society you have frequented: mark down in writing the sins you have committed; make a general confession of your whole life, if you have not as yet made one. Oh ! how much does a general confession contribute to regularity of life in a Christian ! Consider that you have to settle accounts for eternity; and take care to adjust them as if you were on the point of rendering these accounts to Jesus Christ at judgment. Banish from your heart every sinful affection, and every sentiment of rancor ; remove every ground of scruple on account of the injury done to the property or character of others, or of scandal to your neighbor; and resolve to fly from all those occasions in which you should be in danger of losing God. Remember that what now seems difficult will appear impossible at the hour of death.

It is still more important for you to resolve to practice the means of preserving your soul in the grace of God. These means are,—hearing Mass every day, the meditation on the eternal truths, the frequentation of the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist at least every eight days, the visit every day to the Most Holy Sacrament, and to an image of the divine Mother, attendance at her confraternity, spiritual reading, examination of conscience every evening, some special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, along with fasting every Saturday in her honor Above all, resolve to recommend yourself frequently to God and to

the Blessed Virgin, and frequently to invoke, in the time of temptations, the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. These are the names by which you will be able to secure a happy death, and to obtain eternal life.

The practice of these means will be for you a great sign of your predestination. And as to the past, trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, who now gives you these lights, because he desires your salvation; and trust in the intercession of Mary, who obtains these lights for you. Oh ! if you adopt this mode of life, and place great confidence in Jesus and Mary, what aid will you receive from God, and what strength will your soul acquire ! Dearly beloved reader, give yourself then instantly to God, who invites you, and begin to enjoy that peace of which you have been hitherto deprived through your own fault. And what greater peace can a soul enjoy than to be able to say, in going to rest at night. Should death come this night, I hope to die in the grace of God! How happy the man who, amid the terrors of thunder or of earth quakes, is prepared to accept death with resignation, should God be pleased to send it!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! with what fervor do I thank Thee for the light which Thou gavest me! I have so often abandoned Thee and turned my back upon Thee: but Thou hast not abandoned me. Hadst Thou abandoned me I should now be blind, as I have hitherto wished to be; I should be obstinate in my sins, and should not have the desire either to renounce sin or to love Thee. I now feel a great sorrow for having offended Thee, a great desire to be in the state of grace. I feel a hatred of these accursed delights which have made me lose Thy friendship. These sentiments are all graces which come from Thee, and make me hope that Thou wilt pardon and save me. Since,

then, after all my sins, Thou hast not abandoned me—since Thou now wishest to save me, behold, O Lord ! I give myself entirely to Thee. I am sorry, above all things, for having offended Thee; and I propose to lose life a thousand times rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee, O my sovereign Good ! I love Thee, O my Jesus ! who hast died for me; and I hope in Thy blood, that Thou wilt not permit me to be ever again separated from Thee. O my Jesus ! I will never more lose Thee. I wish to love Thee always during life. I wish to love Thee at death. I wish to love Thee for all eternity. Preserve me then, O Lord ! at all times, and increase my love for Thee. This favor I ask through Thy merits. Mary, my hope! pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

We must Detach Ourselves from the World.

It is also necessary to endeavor to be at all times in the state in which we desire to be at death. *Blessed are he dead who die in the Lord (Apoc. Xiv, 13).* St. Ambrose says that they die well who, at the hour of death, are found dead to the world; that is, detached from the goods from which death will separate us by force. We ought then, from this moment, to accept the spoliation of our goods, and the separation from relatives and from everything in this world. Unless we do it voluntarily during life, we shall have to do it through necessity at death, but with extreme pain and great danger of eternal perdition. Hence St. Augustine says, that to settle during life all temporal matters, and dispose by will of all the goods we shall have to bequeath, contribute greatly to a tranquil death; because when all worldly affairs are already adjusted, the soul may be entirely occupied in uniting itself to God. At that hour, we should think and speak only of God and of Paradise. These last moments are too precious to be squandered in

earthly thoughts. At death is completed the crown of the elect; for it is then, perhaps, that they reap the greatest harvest of merits, by embracing, with resignation and love, death and all its pains.

But the Christian who has not been in the habit of exciting these sentiments during life, will not have them at the hour of death. Hence some devout souls, with great spiritual profit to themselves, are accustomed to renew every month, after being at confession and Communion, the Protestation of death along with the Christian acts, imagining themselves at the point of death, and to be near their departure from this world. Unless you do this during life you will find it very difficult to do it at death. In her last illness, that great servant of God, Sister Catharine of St. Alberts, of the order of St. Teresa, sent forth a sigh, and said, " Sisters, I do not sigh through fear of death, for I have lived for twenty-five years in expectation of it; but I sigh at the sight of so many deluded Christians, who spend their life in sin, and reduce themselves to the necessity of making peace with God at death, when I can scarcely pronounce the name of Jesus." Examine then, O my brother, if you are now attached to anything on this earth, to any person, to any honor, to your house, to your money, to conversations or amusements; and reflect that you are not immortal. You must one day, and perhaps very soon, take leave of them all. Why then do you cherish any attachment to them, and thus expose yourself to the risk of an unhappy death? Offer from this moment all to God: tell him you are ready to give up all things whenever he pleases to deprive you of them. If you wish to die with resignation you must from this moment resign yourself to all the contradictions and adversities which may happen to you, and must divest yourself of all affections to earthly things. Imagine yourself on the bed of death, and you will despise all things in this world. " He," says Jerome, "who always

thinks that he is to die, easily despises all things." (Ep. ad Paulin).

If you have not yet chosen a state of life, make choice of that state of life which at death you will wish to have selected, and which will make you die with greater peace. If you have already made choice of a state of life, do now what at death you will wish to have done in that state. Spend every day as if it were the last of your life; and perform every action, every exercise of prayer, make every confession and Communion, as if they were the last of your life. Imagine yourself every hour at the point of death, stretched on a bed, and that you hear that *Proficiscere de hoc mundo* which announces your departure from this world. Oh ! how powerfully will this thought assist you to walk in the way of God, and to detach your heart from this earth ! *Blessed is that servant whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find him so doing (Matt. xxiv, 46)*. He who expects death every hour will die well, though death should come suddenly upon him.

Affections and Prayers.

Fvery Christian ought to be prepared to say at the moment the news of death is announced to him :
 Then, my God, only a few hours remain; during the short remainder of the present life, I wish to love Thee to the utmost of my power, that I may love Thee more perfectly in heaven. But little remains for me to offer to Thee. I offer Thee these pains, and the sacrifice of my life in union with the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for me on the Cross. Lord ! the pains which I suffer are few and light compared with what I have deserved; such as they are, I embrace them as a mark of the love which I bear Thee. Provided I am to love Thee for eternity, I resign myself to all the punishments which Thou wishest

to send me in this or the next life. Chastise me as much as Thou pleasest, but do not deprive me of Thy love. I know that, on account of having so often despised Thy love, I deserved never more to love Thee; but Thou canst not reject a penitent soul. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart, and place all my trust in Thee. Thy death, O my Redeemer ! is my hope. To Thy wounded hands I recommend my soul. *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of Truth (Ps. xxx, 6).* O my Jesus, Thou hast given Thy blood for my salvation: do not suffer me to be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O eternal God, and hope to love Thee for eternity. Mary, my Mother, assist me at the awful moment of death. To thee I now consign my spirit; to thee I recommend myself. Deliver me from **hell.**

>>second part follows>>