VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD

DEATH: FROM FEAR TO FAITH, FROM END TO BEGINNING



The Human Fear of Death

Death is a problem for many. No one wants to die. The deepest desire in a man is to live long, or eternally, without facing death. He thinks that death is the end of this life. But his death has so much of goodness in it, which he does not know. We spend our whole life trying to escape from death. We build hospitals, we take medicines, we pray for long life. Yet, death remains the one certainty that no man can avoid.

We fear it because we think it is the end of everything, the end of our dreams, our relationships, and our work. The Book of Ecclesiastes says, "Man does not know his time" (Eccl 9:12). The Psalmist cries, "What man can live and not see death?" (Ps 89:48). Even in the Old Testament, death was seen as Sheol: a shadowy place, a separation from the living. Job asks in pain, "If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14). But for the believer, death is not the end. It is a beginning of new life. If a believer in Jesus, who really understands life, will not be bothered about his death, for he knows that death gives him another blessed life that cannot be imagined or explained. The Christian does not love death, but he does not fear it either. He knows that the God who gave him life and will not abandon him in death.

Death in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, death was feared as a punishment for sin. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Death entered the world through sin, as St. Paul later explains: "Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin" (Rom 5:12). But slowly, God revealed

more in the second book of Maccabees, we see a firm belief in resurrection. The mother of the seven martyred brothers encourages them: "Do not fear this butcher... the Creator of the world will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again" (2 Macc 7:23). The Prophet Daniel proclaims: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life" (Dan 12:2). The Prophet Isaiah sings "He will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Is 25:8). This was the preparation. The Old Testament planted the seed of hope. The New Testament brings it to fulfilment in Christ.

Christ Conquered Death: The Theology of the Cross and Resurrection

The center of our Christian faith is not death, but the death and resurrection of Jesus. Death is not a natural accident in God's plan. God did not create death. God created life. Death is the consequence of sin, but in Jesus, death itself is defeated. On the Cross, Jesus took upon Himself the death that belonged to us. He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). He experienced the full darkness of death the separation, the pain, the abandonment. But on the third day, He rose.

Death could not hold Him. St. Paul triumphantly proclaims: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:54-55). Because Jesus rose, our death is transformed. It is no longer an eternal separation, but a Passover from this life to eternal life. Jesus Himself says: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26). This faith has been unremittingly lived by the saints when they faced death.

A Witness to Resurrection

St. Oscar Romero a persistent believer in Jesus, the Archbishop of El Salvador, whose inspired sermons angered the government and the powerful land lords, was threatened on the phone by officials that he would

be killed if he raises his voice for the poor. "I am not afraid of death," he replied, "I am a Christian, I do not believe in a death without resurrection." "After my death, I shall resurrect to be with the Lord. I shall be born again in my people. I shall be alive in their struggle for freedom, and human dignity." One day as he was celebrating the Mass, he was shot dead. He died on the Altar of the Lord, like Jesus.

Romero understood what we often forget: that martyrdom is not defeat. It is victory. He died because he spoke for the poor, because he refused to remain silent while his people were oppressed. His death was not the end of his voice; it became louder after his death. In the same way, every Christian who lives for truth and justice will live forever. His body may die, but his spirit, his message of love will continue to live in his people. The Church calls this "the martyrium"- the witness. The martyr does not fear death because he has already died to self. For him, the life of Christ is more important than his own biological life. This is the supreme proof of the Resurrection faith.

God Writes Our Birth and Death

Our birth and death have been written by God; it is our duty to write the content of the life in between. This is the most important truth of life. We did not choose when we were born. We will not know when we die. But between those two pages, God has given us a blank page. We are the authors. We decide what to write on that page. Some write only about themselves, about money, power, pleasure. Their book will be forgotten soon. Others write about love, service, and sacrifice. Their book will never be closed.

Scripture reminds us of the stewardship of life: "Teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart" (Ps 90:12). Life is not our property; it is a talent entrusted to us by God. We will have to give an account of it. It is said, when we die, we put an end to our life yet we may live eternally. The man who helps the poor, works for their development, and respects

their dignity is helping God in His distress. He does not die, he lives with the Lord. The Lord Jesus says: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).

When we feed the hungry, when we visit the sick, when we stand for the poor, we are not doing social work. We are meeting Christ Himself. And that meeting does not end with death. This is the theology of Judgment. In Matthew 25, the final judgment is not about rituals, but about love in action. The Kingdom is given to those who saw Christ in the poor.

St. Paul's Theology

Death is not a full stop. It is a comma. It is a doorway. For the world, death is loss. For the Christian, death is gain. St. Paul says, "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain" (Phil 1:21).Why is dying gain for Paul? Because he knows that death means to be with Christ. (Phil 1:23). Paul does not speak of death as annihilation, but as being with Christ. This is the heart of Pauline eschatology. Paul also teaches us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: "We do not want you to be uninformed about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope, For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died."

What we call death is only the separation of the soul from the body, not the separation of the soul from God. We are made for eternity. Our heart longs for something that this world cannot give. That longing is God's invitation to heaven. St. Augustine rightly said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

November - The Month of Remembrance and the Communion of Saints

In this month of November, we remember our beloved dead. We visit their graves, we light candles, and we offer Masses. We do not weep as

those who have no hope. We weep because we love them, but we also rejoice because we believe they are alive in God. The Church teaches us about the Communion of Saints. Death does not break our communion. Our dead are not far from us. They are with God, and they pray for us, just as we pray for them. In every Eucharist, we are united with them. This is why we celebrate All Saints (Nov 1) and All Souls (Nov 2) together.

The Saints in Heaven, the Souls in Purgatory, and we on earth are one Church, one Body of Christ. Death cannot divide the Body of Christ. The doctrine of Purgatory is the mercy of God. Those who die in God's grace but are not yet fully purified are cleansed by God's love, so that they may enter into the fullness of His presence. Our prayers, our Mass offerings, our sacrifices can help them. This is the beautiful solidarity of the Church. This month is also a time for us to examine our own life. If today were to be our last day, what would we have written in our book? Would we be satisfied? Would God be happy with our page?

Live So That You Never Die

The man who lives only for himself dies completely. The man who lives for others never dies (Mt 16:23, Mk 8:35). He lives in the memory of his people, in the good he has done, and above all, in the presence of the Lord. Therefore, let us not fear death. Let us fear a life lived without love, without justice, and without God. Let us live each day as if it were the last page of the book God has given us to write with love for the poor, with respect for human dignity, and with faith in the Risen Lord. Then death will not be our enemy, but our friend, who will take us home to the Father. "The Lord Jesus is our Resurrection and our Life. Whoever believes in Him, even if he dies, will live" (Jn 11:25).

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