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Death & the Future Life Pages...

Death: A Source for Sound Philosophy

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Through bodily death not only have we not sustained an injury, but also we have gained! Mortality has turned out to be a gain and a benefit for us, since we do not continue to sin in an immortal body. Furthermore, bodily death becomes a source for beneficial and salutary philosophy. Thanks to this horrible event, we have, says St. John Chrysostom, "a myriad opportunities for philosophical perserverance. For death convinces us, both when it is present and when we await for it, to be modest and to live with prudence and to be humble and to be spared from every evil." [1]

Truly, bodily death constitutes a strong and salutary medicine for restraining the base passions of the soul. For, as the physicians say, opposites are mutually therapeutic. As we warm what is frozen and moisten what has dried for the purpose of healing, so it is with the all-wise Physician of our souls, the Triune God, who found a way and arranged things with condescension and infinite love for man in order to heal the sinful passions of the soul, Because of sin the soul was overcome by despair and foolish rebellion against God. It was filled with traumas and wounds. For this reason our benevolent God uses a therapy, which restrains its egotism, its satanic pride and its rebellious excitement. What is this therapy? Death! For God fortifies the soul with death. This is why He made the body mortal and permitted it to decay, to be dissolved and to be eaten by worms and to exhude foul odors, placing from the beginning, by all these means, the foundations for humility. Through these God prevents all, and even the very proud, from holding high opinions of themselves. "For what is more foul than the human body? What is more worthless than one who is dead?" [2]

On another occasion, St. John Chrysostom taught: He who has died is not harmed at all by death, but the one who lives gains immensely from this event. One can benefit much from another's dead body. For, when one sees the person who only yesterday or even earlier was walking with him and is now being consumed by worms and decomposed into pus, ashes and dust, and if he still has the impudence and irrational rebellion which the devil has against God, he cowers from fear, he collects and humbles himself, and is instructed to forbear and to accept humility, the mother of virtues as a resident of his soul. So, he who dies is not harmed, because he will again receive his body immaculate and incorruptible. And he who remains and continues to live also gains a great deal. Consequently, God has placed in our life an important teacher of philosophy that instructs our mind, controls our passions, calms the waves of our stormy life and brings serenity! "This is no ordinary teacher of philosophy that has been introduced into our life." [3]

To look upon the dead is an opportunity for prudence and beneficial thoughts that avert evil and sin. The same Father goes on by saying: Look carefully at the rich and the selfish how they gather together, when they stand by the coffin of the dead and observe the dead human body to be laid out, deaf and motionless; when they see the children of the deceased orphaned, his wife widowed, his friends sad, his servants dressed in black and generally having the entire household covered with grief. See, also, how they are humbled and how they are all contrite. While they have heard a great multitude of teachings and have not gained anything, as soon as they see the dead they are moved, without any coercion to philosophize continuously. As they observe the mortal, insignificant and corrupt human nature, they become conscious of the weakness and instability of their wealth and power. They even foresee in the misfortunes of others "their very own changes." And he continues: There is death and, yet, there is so much stealing and greed. The stronger swallow up those who are poorer, as "the large fish eats the small". What would happen, one

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wonders, if there were no death? Even though they see that, because of death they will not be able to enjoy the things they covet, for whether they like it or not they must leave them to others, they, nevertheless, are wrathful and angry against the weak. What would happen, one wonders, if they lived with security and without the fear of death? What would restrain them from their irreverent and criminal deeds? What would extinguish their evil desire? [4]

Moreover, the death of the body, even though it is undesirable; even though it provokes horror within us, is, nevertheless, a blessing from God in that it is the escape from the world of earth to the world of heaven. It is a passage from finite time to eternity without end. It sounds strange, but it is true: Eternal life is approached through ... death! This is the most paradoxical thing about death, it stems from the unfathomable depth of God's wisdom and love.

If, after the transgression of Adam and Eve, the infinitely good and wise God had not permitted death to enter into the world, our life would have been insignificant and meaningless. But now our earthly life acquires meaning, depth and purpose, because it is terminated by death, which opens the doorway to heaven. If we consider the material world as self-sufficient, then everything in it is vain. Though we are informed that bodily death is indeed a terrible and bitter therapy, yet, it is, also, a transitional stage to eternity; when we think that this painful and agonizing procedure is one way to scale over the abyss that stands between the present and the future, then we truly understand how beneficial bodily death is.

In other words, death seems to say to us: Do not be fooled; the things of this present world are constantly changing, running, leaving. Eternity, for which your soul yearn, exists elsewhere. To that eternity it is I who will transfer you. For I have been injected into the life of you humans as a punishment and a disgrace, but God uses me so very wisely as a vehicle, which transfers you to the place where you so strongly and deeply desire to be. 1, by divine edict and inscrutable providence, transfer you from the corruptible to the incorruptible; from the earthly to the heavenly; from the temporal to the eternal!

Endnotes

1. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, On Romans, Homily 10,3 PG 60,478.
2. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, Homily 8, On the Goths 3 PG 63, 505.
3. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, To the Scandalized 7PG 52,496.
4. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, On Psalm 110, 1-2 PG 55, 280-281.

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