



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI JESUM

DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

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“... and at the Hour of Our Death ...”



Maria... in hora mortis

In the Angelic Salutation (Hail Mary) we conclude the prayer with, “now, and at the hour of our death.”

Death *will* come to each of us — and not at the hour of our choosing. Perhaps for one whom we had loved it has come already. But so has Mary ... praying for us *in hora mortis* — at the hour of our death. Had we not implored this of her in every *Hail Mary* that we had uttered in our lives ... that *our name* be on her holy lips in the hour we most need it?

We instinctively know, even if we had never been told, had never witnessed the scandal, the loss, and the corruption of death — that we are called to pass through that valley of deep shadow, through cypress-whispered-lies carried on a wind to the west that subdues even the sun in the vastness of night. All speaks of an end.

How many times in our lives has God called us — and the way to Him was a pass, a pass deep in shadow through a menacing valley of towering fear ... a valley haunted by the shadows of our sins, the specters of our crimes — long ago absolved by God but which we *still* bear in a justice ill-conceived, and, because it

understood nothing of love, and not knowing love, knew nothing of forgiveness and absolution. What is more, darker things, things ancient and evil inhabit that valley with towering walls of despair, a valley unfathomably deep in pain and dark with suffering.

Death, we found, is not the only dark corridor.

“Semel Sepultus bis Mortuus”

These words are engraved on the tomb of *Duns Scotus*, the great medieval Franciscan theologian and philosopher. They mean, “*Buried once. Died twice.*”

Simply put, **we must die before we die**. It seems paradoxical, but for any life lived in Christ, it is well understood. We must, and in so many, many ways, die to ourselves, to our own wills, our own inclinations, our desires, our pride, our arrogance ... all that would carry us off to the “Second death” ... that final death in which all utterly perish and from which none ever return. This is the death from which all sane men flee. St. John beheld it from afar in the Book of the Apocalypse.¹

What we must come to understand is that each of these “valleys” causes us to die

to ourselves in some way. Each is an experience of walking through a valley over which the shadow of death in one form or another has fallen. More often than not, we are seized with fear, we cannot see the way ahead, we deem ourselves alone, abandoned and forgotten. The way grows narrow, and one by one all our pretensions fall aside, our defenses crumble, and in the gathering darkness we are left with two options only: faith or despair ... we tremble in either and are blind in both.

We have reached the end of all *things*. If we have chosen faith, faith in God, ... the darkness becomes sacred. Despair, that doorway to death, is shattered by a blinding shaft of holy light. The Holy Spirit Himself calls us to place our trust and confidence in Christ Who conquered death ... *even* while, in our humble humanity, we see no solution or answer to our problem or pain.

This is the “Dark Night of the Soul”, the path of pure faith ... a time, a place, in which we cannot find words, in which we are become speechless, surrounded with silence and sanctified through suffering. We collapse to our knees before the mercy, goodness, and absolute certainty of God. He Who has chosen us, we have chosen in turn.

In every valley, in every darkness ... in every death, we hear the whispered prayer for which we have longed all our lives each time we have cried out, “Pray for us, now and at the hour of our death!” The culmination of that prayer of Saint and sinner, of sinner become Saint, will it go unanswered *in medio umbrae mortis*, in the midst of the shadow of death?

In your perplexity, vulnerability and uncertainty, call upon Mary; she will unfailingly bring you to her Son Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As a parched and dying nomad prostrate in a desert night, you will fall into her gentle arms – and she will pour on your lips and into your heart the very Living Water of Life.

Ite ad Mariam! Go to Mary!

¹ Apocalypse 2.11, 21.8

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