

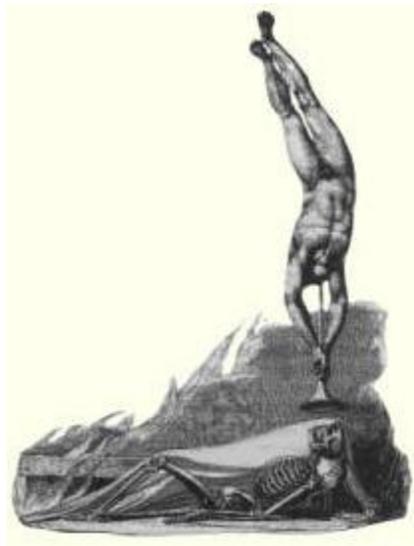


Boston Catholic Journal

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"Today you will be with me in Paradise." (St. Luke 23.43)

DEATH AND DYING



The Narrow Gate

What Christ *REALLY* Said about Dying

Many will hear these words today. Some have already heard them.

We may hear these words today.

What should give us pause – is that we may die today and *NOT* hear these beautiful words spoken to us.

I know that this is terribly incorrect in contemporary theological circles, and that it is ... well, anathema, to suggest such a thing from the pulpit. It is ... somehow scandalous to us, inappropriate, insensitive, incorrect.

The Jesus we are taught is *still* – some 40 years later – something of a "Flowerchild" and the Gospels an updated redaction of "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Repair" – two phenomena of both *fusion* and *confusion*, a mutilated and unsuccessful attempt at fusing the East and the West morally, culturally, and spiritually ... resulting in a confusion of what is authentic to each. Today, I suppose you would call it a "Remix" – a kind of syncopated version of the Bible by "Jesus Christ Superstar".

Nirvana came to Nineveh. And somehow it has not yet left.

Everyone makes it there ... at least eventually. Today we have re-christened it "Heaven" ... once again ... but much of the baggage that came to Nineveh remains on the steps. "All Dogs Go to Heaven" --- and so do all men. What you do, how you live your life, the notion of authenticity in your relationship to Christ, and the various impedimenta to Heaven detailed in Holy Scripture, are largely beside the point.

You are "saved" ... with your dog.

Heaven is a given. It is a "right". It is more than a right, it is an eventuality, a certainty. After all, didn't Jesus Christ pay the penalty for your sins and mine? The deal is done. Sit back, enjoy the "good life" (which, by the way, is not Budweiser and Broadway) and when the time comes – *your* time – reap the benefits of His Passion. There is nothing you have to do. Nothing you ought not do ... at least that will count in the end.

What is more, you gave a beggar a dollar once, and the Church \$5.00 last year!

*But I wonder – and you should wonder – **will** we hear these blessed words really spoken to us? Or will death come to us in a thundering silence ... or worse.*

This may surprise you, and will certainly make you uncomfortable, but the fact remains that Jesus spoke of Hell more than any other subject. It is true. He makes reference to it 70 times. It is mentioned 162 times in the New Testament.

*"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, **and those who find it are few.**" (St. Matthew 7.13-14)*

I won't belabor the point. For all your efforts, you cannot reconcile what Jesus tells you in the verse above, and what your priest or pastor seems to assure you at the pulpit ... concerning the terribly *false certainty* of Paradise for virtually *all* who pass into death. It is not what Christ said. What He said makes us nervous, and with good reason. Not everyone goes to Heaven. In fact, Christ Himself tells us that those who will find it are *few*. Not a very satisfactory state of affairs ... is it? It could be worse: you could go on believing that you can "do your own thing" --- and not Christ's --- and still expect to get to Heaven --- until the day you die.

You are being lulled into a false security and you know it. What is worse, you cease to pray for your dead in your mistaken assurance that they are already there ... if they make it at all!

In our fear confronting Hell, we *deny* it – no matter *what* Jesus says, no matter *what* He tells us. We will retain those who will assure us of our salvation, and the salvation of those we love – and we will flee or effectively fire those who will not provide that assurance as a given.

Paying Hell to Stay the Hell Away?

... as though we could purchase Heaven itself! or pay Hell to stay the Hell away ...

For all your pretenses, in the dark hours of the night and in the lonely places of the world you are far less assured of hearing these blessed words than your priest, pastor, or false friend is able to convince you. In your heart you have heard stirrings in the night and whispers you would that you had never heard.

The Good Thief heard these words on the very *cross* — and you would hear them on the comfort of your couch?

God loves you! He admonishes you! He leads you! To that Paradise He has prepared for you – and *away* from that Hell on which you are bent.

Both are real. Jesus said so.

It would cost the thief his life, and a tremendous act of faith, before he heard those words.

Will it cost less of you?



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