



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI JESUM

DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

“Salus animarum Suprema Lex esto — The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church” (Canon Law 1752)

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Sudden Death



A Time to Reap

“Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly. For as a snare shall it come upon all that sit upon the face of the whole earth.” (St. Luke 21.34-36)

Sudden Death

Last night, as I sat immersed in writing, out of nowhere a tremendously brilliant flash filled the room accompanied instantly by an ear-shattering clap of thunder. There was no lapse between the lightning and the thunder. They came together with utter instantaneity. It appeared that a bomb had exploded against my house. I was startled, unable to comprehend what had occurred, except that it was breathtakingly instant, totally unexpected, completely unanticipated.

I had once been told by Franciscan Father Benedict Groeschel that in thunder we hear something of the judgment of God. It is primordial, instinctual. It is foreboding, fraught with the imminent approach of danger, impending destruction, a distant,

muttered anger boding the approach of something inimical to life. Even an atheist, I am convinced, hears something of his sins, and something of judgment, in that portentous rumble that causes the earth to tremble under his feet. It evokes images that all our intellectualizing, all our pretenses, cannot shake.

LAST NIGHT, 153 PEOPLE FROM THE GREATER BOSTON AREA DIED

For many of them, death came like that clap of thunder. Immersed in many things, and thoughtless of any storm, before they knew what had happened, they had died. They did not get to shut down their computers, turn off their televisions, or put their book neatly on the table beside them. It struck instantly, like a storm ... or a thief ... in the night.

No time for that “Act of Contrition” indefinitely postponed until it could not be uttered.

“I love you.”

“I am sorry.”

“Tell my brother ...”

In the blink of an eye it all falls away. No time. Not even for words. And no bargaining ... no postponing ...

It will be stunning — for it will have found you utterly unprepared. A millisecond stands between you and death. Hardly time for the realization, let alone preparation. It will have come. *Mors stupebit*. Death struck. It came ... and found you busy ...

That Confession you were going to make “someday”; that amending of your life that you “soon” would undertake; the sins that you had resolved to renounce “beginning tomorrow”; the pardon you would seek from someone you had harmed – in a thundering instant, your pretensions are removed ... and you are stunned, staggered. You were *sure, certain* of the next minute, the next hour, the next day.

So were many — perhaps most — of the 153 people who died last night.

Think about it. Like the 153 people who, as of last night, are no more among us, chances are that you will wager against God and still think that you can bargain with death. It will come to another 153 tomorrow, and, like the 153 before them, it will find that it won the wager.

It always does.

But *you* think that you can beat the odds.

You are a fool. There are no odds. There are certainties. Many. And some you will wish you had come to terms with long before that clap of thunder.

One of them is God.

And one of them is apart from Him.

There is a time to sow ... there is also a time to reap ...

Think about it while *you* have time.

Or do you ...?

So ... what are your plans for tomorrow?

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