



Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI JESUM
DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

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To One Who Fears Death and Dying

“Numquid apertæ tibi sunt portæ mortis et ostia tenebrosa vidisti?”

"Have the Gates of Death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the Doors of
the Shadow of Death?" (Job 38.17)

“Consummatem est” — It is finished

Christ spoke these words upon the Cross when the will of the Father had been
accomplished, done, fulfilled, consummated.

If we have been faithful and obedient servants, at the end of our own journey we will recognize that the *purpose* of our life in Christ has, at last, been fully accomplished.

We have no more to do, nothing more to offer.

The hour is come.

It is the hour, not of darkness nor desolation, not of dereliction, but of *fulfillment*: *the Father's will has been fulfilled, accomplished, in us*. Who would not *rejoice* in this realization?

It is not an end. It is a consummation; the divine purpose for which we had been created has *finally* been fulfilled. This will be cause for *joy*.

God is not "the end" of our being, but the *fulfillment* of our being, and even this is not an end. When we reflect upon our lives we find that it has not so much been a *being* — as a continuous act of *becoming*, of becoming perpetually *more* than we were, more than we *are*.

Death as an *ending*? No ... in the most profound sense it is the *end of all ending* — which, as such, and necessarily, *must* be a *beginning*.

Do we *instinctively* fear death? Or is the fear of death *learned* or *acquired*?

Children do not fear death, and we can only *speculate* that animals fear death

rather than pain. The answer to these questions must be sought elsewhere and is beyond the scope of this book. One of the most common answers to this perplexity is that: “We fear what we do not know”

But is that so? It is certainly the case that there are many things that we do not know — *and do not fear*. But more apropos of our present reflection we can turn to Plato’s *Apology* in which Socrates is condemned to death. His friends Crito, Phaedo, Simmias and Cebe plead with him to flee, but Socrates refuses on these (among other) grounds:

... *fear of death* is indeed the pretense of wisdom, and not real wisdom, *being the appearance of knowing the unknown*; since no one knows whether death, which they *in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good*. Is there not here conceit of knowledge, which is a disgraceful sort of ignorance? (*Apology*, 29a-b).

If Socrates, 399 years before the birth of Christ, reasoned that we had no warrant to fear death ... *how much more* do we have greater hope still since we have been baptized into Christ’s *own Death and Resurrection*?

Unless we have lived evil lives, immersed in sin, moral turpitude, and insolence — disdaining God and all that He requires of us — any fear of death is not simply a

pretense to knowledge that we do not possess, but an implicit offense against the Theological virtue of Hope which is *necessary* to our salvation.

What awaits us is far more beautiful than ever we imagined:

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.” (1 Cor. 2.9)

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