The four last things: death, judgment, hell, heaven

by

Martin, von Cochem, 1634-1712

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THE FOUR LAST THINGS.
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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BENZIGER BROTHERS,
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THE FOUR LAST THINGS:

DEATH.
JUDGMENT.
HELL.
HEAVEN.

BY
FATHER MARTIN VON COCHEM, O.S.F.C.

"Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."
Nihil Obstat.

THOMAS L. KINKEAD,
Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

MICHAEL AUGUSTINE,
Archbishop of New York.

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THE FOUR LAST THINGS.

PART I.
ON DEATH.

CHAPTER I.
ON THE TERRORS OF DEATH.

It appears to me unnecessary to say much about the terrors of death. The subject has been sufficiently enlarged upon by various writers; besides, every one knows and feels for himself that life is sweet and death is bitter. However old a man may be, however broken in health, however miserable his circumstances, the thought of death is an unwelcome one. There are three principal reasons why all sensible people fear death so much:

First, because the love of life, the dread of death is inherent in human nature. Secondly, because every rational being is well aware that death is bitter, and the separation of soul and body cannot take place
without inexpressible suffering. Thirdly, because no one knows whither he will go after death, or how he will stand in the Day of Judgment.

It will be well to explain the second and third of these reasons rather more fully, in order on the one hand that those who lead a careless life may perhaps be awakened thereby to a fear of death, and learn to avoid sin, and on the other that each one of us may be warned to prepare for death, lest we be overtaken by it unawares. Every one shrinks instinctively from death, because it is bitter, and painful beyond description to human nature. The soul of man is subject to many anxieties, apprehensions and sorrows, and the body is subject to pain and sickness of all kinds, yet none of these pains can be compared to the agony of death. A man who loses his good name and his property feels acute grief, but he does not die of it. All suffering and sickness, all grief and anguish, however terrible, is less bitter than death. Hence we see death to be a mighty monarch, the most cruel, the most relentless, the most formidable enemy of mankind. Look at a man wrestling with death, and you will see how the tyrant overpowers, disfigures, prostrates his victim.

Now why is death so hard, so terrible a thing? It is because the soul has to separate itself from the body. Body and soul were created for each other, and so intimate is their union that a parting between them seems almost impossible. They would endure
almost anything rather than be torn asunder. The soul is fearful of the future, and of the unknown land to which she is going. The body is conscious that as soon as the soul departs from it, it will become the prey of worms. Consequently the soul cannot bear to leave the body, nor the body to part from the soul. Body and soul desire their union to remain unbroken, and together to enjoy the sweets of life.

In one of his epistles to St. Augustine, St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, relates what was told him by a man who had been raised from the dead. Amongst other things, he said: "The moment when my soul left my body, was one of such awful pain and distress that no one can imagine the anguish I then endured. If all conceivable suffering and pain were put together they would be as nothing in comparison with the torture I underwent at the separation of soul and body." And to emphasize his words, he added, addressing St. Cyril: "Thou knowest that thou hast a soul, but thou knowest not what it is. Thou knowest that beings exist called angels, but thou art ignorant of their nature. Thou knowest also that there is a God, but thou canst not comprehend His being. So it is with everything that has not corporeal shape; our understanding cannot grasp these things. In like manner it is impossible for thee to understand how I could suffer such intense agony in one short moment."
And if some people apparently pass away most peacefully, this is because nature, exhausted by suffering, has no longer the force to struggle with death. We know from the testimony of Our Redeemer Himself that no agony is like the agony of death. Although throughout the whole course of His sorrowful Passion, He was tortured in a terrible manner, yet all the martyrdom He endured was not to be compared with what He suffered at the moment of His death. This we gather from the Gospels. Nowhere do we find that at any period of His life the greatness of the pains He bore extorted from Our Lord a cry of anguish. But when the moment came for Him to expire, and the ruthless hand of death rent His Heart asunder, we read that He cried out with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. Hence it is evident that at no period of the Passion did Christ suffer so acutely as at the most painful separation of His sacred soul from His blessed body.

In order that mankind might at least in some measure understand how terrible was the death Christ died for us, He ordained that we, at our dissolution, should taste something of the bitterness of His death, and experience the truth of the following words of Pope St. Gregory: "Christ's conflict with death represented our last conflict, teaching us that the agony of death is the keenest agony that man has ever felt or will ever feel. It is the will of
On the Terrors of Death.

God that man should suffer so intensely at the close of his life, in order that we may recognize and appreciate the magnitude of Christ's love for us, the inestimable benefit He has conferred on us by enduring death for our sakes. For it would have been impossible for man fully to know the infinite love of God, unless he too had drunk to some extent of the bitter chalice which Christ drank."

In this passage from the writings of the holy Pope Gregory we are taught that Christ ordained that all men in the hour of their dissolution should suffer the like pains which Christ suffered for us in His last agony, in order that they may gain some knowledge, by their own experience, of the terrible nature of the death He endured for us, and the great price He paid for our ransom. How painful, how terrible, how awful death will be for us, if our death is in any degree to resemble Christ's most agonizing death!

How severe a conflict is before us poor mortals! What torments await us at our last hour! One is almost inclined to think it would have been preferable never to have been born, than to be born to suffer such anguish. But it is thus that heaven is to be won, and through this narrow gate alone can we enter into paradise. Wherefore, O Christian, accept your destiny cheerfully, and form a steadfast resolution to bear un murmuringly the bitterness of death. For it is a great merit to yield up one's life
—the life every man loves so well—and submit with a ready and willing mind to the pangs of death. And for the purpose of encouraging you to gain merit in your last moments, let me counsel you to make the following determination to suffer death bravely.

RESOLUTION.

O God of all justice, who hast ordained that since the Fall of our first parents all men should die, and also that it should be the lot of many amongst us to taste in their death something of the pains Thy Son endured at the hour of His death, I submit most willingly to this Thy stern decree. Although life is sweet to me, and death appears most bitter, yet out of obedience to Thee I voluntarily accept death with all its pains, and am ready to yield up my soul whenever, wherever, in what way or manner soever it may please Thy divine providence to appoint. And since Thou hast made death so bitter to man, in order that we may feel to a certain extent by our own experience how painful a death Thy beloved Son underwent for our sakes, I willingly accept the penalty of death, that I may at least at my latter end know something of the pains my blessed Lord suffered on my account. In honor, therefore, of His bitter Passion and death, I now cheerfully subject myself to whatever sufferings I may be called upon to pass through at the moment of my depart-
ure, and declare my determination to bear them with all the constancy of which I am capable. I pray that this resolution on my part may be pleasing in Thy sight, and that Thou wilt give me grace to bear my last agony with patience. Amen.
CHAPTER II.

ON THE ASSAULTS OF SATAN AT THE HOUR OF DEATH.

Although death is in itself most bitter, yet its bitterness is not a little enhanced by the vivid remembrance of the sins of our past life, by the thought of the judgment to come, of the eternity before us, and by the assaults of Satan. These four things fill the soul with such terror, that it would infallibly despair unless strengthened by the help of God. We will enter into some explanation of each of these four things, and also indicate some means of combating the fears they inspire.

With regard to the assaults of Satan, know that the all-just God permits him to have great power to assail us at the hour of death; not indeed for our perdition, but for our probation. Before expiring the Christian has yet to prove that nothing can avail to make him forsake his God. For this reason the evil enemy employs all the power he has received, and brings all his forces to bear upon a man when he is dying, in the hope of causing him to sin, and thrusting him down to hell. During our whole lifetime he attacks us fiercely, and neglects no means
On the Assaults of Satan at the Hour of Death.

whereby he may deceive us. But all these persecutions do not bear comparison with the final onslaught with which he endeavors to overcome us at the last. Then he raves and rages, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

This we learn from the following passage in the Apocalypse (xii. 12): "Woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time."

These words bear a special application for the dying, against whom the devil conceives a great wrath, and whom he makes every effort to seduce. For he knows full well that if he does not get them into his power now, he will never again have the chance of doing so. Hear what St. Gregory says on this point: "Consider well how terrible is the hour of death, and how appalling the remembrance of our evil deeds will be at that time. For the spirits of darkness will recall all the harm they have done us, and remind us of the sins which we have committed at their instigation. They will not go to the deathbed of the godless only, but they will be present with the elect, striving to discover something sinful whereof to accuse them. Alas! how will it fare with us hapless mortals in that hour, and what can we say for ourselves, seeing how innumerable are the sins to be laid to our charge? What can we answer to our adversaries, when they place all our sins before us, with the object of reducing us to despair?"
On Death.

The evil spirits will tempt their unhappy victim at the moment of death on various points, but especially in regard to the sins into which he has most frequently fallen. If during his lifetime he has cherished hatred towards any one, they will conjure up before his dying eyes the image of that person, rehearsing all he did to injure him, in order to revive the flame of hate towards that enemy, or kindle it anew. Or if any one has transgressed against purity, they will show him the accomplice of his sin, and strive to awaken the guilty passion felt for that individual. If he has been troubled with doubts concerning faith, they recall to his mind the article of belief which he had difficulty in accepting, representing it to him as untrue. If a man has a tendency to pusillanimity, the evil spirits encourage it in him, that they may perchance rob him of his hope of salvation. The man who has sinned through pride, and boasted of his good works, they seek to ensnare by flattery, assuring him that he stands high in the favor of God, and all he has done cannot fail to secure him a place in heaven. Again, if in his lifetime a man has given way to impatience, allowing himself to be angry and irritated by every trifle, they make his illness appear most irksome to him that he may become impatient, and rebel against God for having sent upon him so painful a malady. Or if he has been tepid and indevout, without fervor in prayer or assiduity in his religious exercises
they try to maintain in his soul this state of apathy, suggesting to him that his physical weakness is too great even to allow him to join in the prayers his friends read to him. Finally, they tempt those who have led a godless life, and repeatedly fallen into mortal sin, to despair, representing their transgressions to be so great as to be past forgiveness. In a word, the spirits of evil assail mortals at the moment of death most fiercely at their most vulnerable point, just as a skilful general will storm a fortress on the side where he perceives the ramparts to be weakest.

But the devils do not always confine themselves to tempting a man in regard to his chief failings and predominant faults; they frequently tempt him to sins of which he has not hitherto been guilty. For these crafty foes spare no pains to deceive the dying, and if they fail in one way, they attempt to succeed in another. These temptations are of no ordinary character. They are sometimes so violent that it is impossible for weak mortals to resist them without supernatural assistance. If it is all that any one in good health can do to withstand the assaults of the devil, and even such a one is often overcome by them, how difficult must it be for one who is enfeebled by sickness to struggle against foes so formidable! On this point a pious writer says: "Unless the dying man has, previous to his last illness, armed himself against these attacks, and accustomed himself to do
On Death.

battle with his spiritual adversaries, he stands a poor chance of prevailing against them at the moment of death. If he does so, it will be only through the assistance of almighty God, of our blessed Lady, of his guardian angel, or of one of the saints. For our merciful God and His angels and blessed saints do not abandon the Christian in the hour of his direst need; they hasten to his help, that is, provided he is deserving of their aid.” In order to prepare one’s self before one’s last illness to combat these temptations, it will be advisable to recite with due devotion the following prayer:

O Jesus, compassionate Redeemer of mankind, I recall to mind the threefold temptation Thou didst undergo from the evil enemy, and I pray Thee through the glorious victory Thou didst obtain over him, to stand by me in my last conflict and fortify me against all his temptations. I know that in my own strength I cannot contend against so powerful a foe, and I must assuredly be vanquished unless Thou, or Thy blessed saints, grant me timely assistance. Therefore I now earnestly implore Thy help and that of Thy saints, and propose to arm myself to the best of my ability by Thy grace, to meet the temptations that await me. I promise now, before Thee and the holy angels and blessed saints, that I will never voluntarily expose myself to any temptation, of whatever nature it may be, but with the help of Thy grace I will combat it vigorously. Amen.
CHAPTER III.

ON THE APPARITION OF THE SPIRITS OF DARKNESS.

Besides what has been already mentioned, the terrible appearance of the evil spirits makes death yet more alarming to us. It is the opinion of many of the Fathers, that every one, when expiring, sees the evil enemy, at any rate at the moment of drawing his last breath, if not before. How appalling this sight is, and with what terror it must inspire the dying, exceeds the power of words to declare. It is related of Brother Giles that one day, when he was praying in his cell, the devil appeared to him in so frightful a shape, that the Brother lost the power of speech, and thought his last hour had come. As his lips could not utter a sound, he raised his heart in humble supplication to God, and the apparition vanished. Afterwards, when relating what had befallen him to his brother-monks, he trembled from head to foot as he described the hideous aspect of the adversary of mankind. Then going to St. Francis, he asked him this question: “Father, have you ever seen anything in this world the sight of which was so horrible that it was enough to kill one.
On Death.

to behold it?" And the Saint replied: "I have indeed seen such a thing; it is none other than the devil, whose aspect is so loathsome that no one could gaze upon it even for a short time and live, unless God specially enabled him to do so."

St. Cyril also, writing to St. Augustine, says that one of the three men who were raised from the dead told him: "As the hour of my departure drew nigh, a multitude of devils, countless in number, came and stood about me. Their forms were more horrible than anything imagination can conceive. One would rather be burnt in the fire than be compelled to look upon them. These demons ranged themselves around me, and reproached me with all the misdeeds I had ever done, thinking to drive me to despair. And in fact I should have given way before them, had not God in His mercy come to my succor."

Here we have the testimony of one who actually had learnt by his own experience how frightful the appearance of the evil enemy is, and who declares that nothing can be more horrible than the form the devil assumes.

O my God! how overwhelming the terrors that will take possession of the hapless individual who lies at the point of death when the infernal dragon appears, full of rage, and threatening to swallow him up in his fiery jaws.

In this hour of supreme distress, send my guard-
On the Apparition of the Spirits of Darkness.

ian angel to me, O God, I pray Thee, that he may drive away the evil enemy, otherwise I shall infal-
libly fall into despair and lose all hope of my sal-
vation.

O most blessed Virgin Mary! who didst crush the head of the serpent, be with me in the hour of my death and do not permit the presence of the cruel adversary to cause my eternal perdition.
CHAPTER IV.

ON THE FEAR OF HELL.

Death is rendered yet more bitter to us by the fear of hell and the clear view of eternity before us. For when we are dangerously ill, and death stares us in the face, the terror which fills us at the prospect of eternity is so overwhelming, that we are filled with fear. For we see plainly that in a few days—a few hours perhaps—we must enter eternity, and we know not what awaits us there. The dread lest we should be lost everlasting is so great as to cause us to shudder.

Moreover, the alarm that tortures us is not a little augmented by the remembrance of the sins whereby we have oftentimes deserved hell; for no man can be certain whether he has done penance aright, and whether he has really obtained pardon. This is explained by a passage from the writings of the aforementioned Pope St. Gregory, who describes this fear in the following words:

"The just man who is truly concerned about his eternal salvation will from time to time think of his future Judge. He will meditate before death over-
On the Fear of Hell.

takes him upon the account he will have to give of his life. If there are no great sins wherewith his conscience reproaches him, he still has cause for alarm on account of the daily sins of which he perhaps takes little heed. For how often do we not sin in thought? It is comparatively easy to avoid evil deeds, but it is a far more difficult matter to keep one’s heart free from inordinate thoughts. Yet we read in Holy Scripture: ‘Woe to you that devise that which is unprofitable and work evil in your thoughts’ (Mich. ii. 1). And again: ‘In your heart you work iniquities’ (Ps. lvii. 3).

“Hence the just are ever in fear of the awful judgments of God, for they are conscious that all these secret sins will be brought to judgment, as St. Paul says: ‘In that day God shall judge the secrets of men’ (Rom. ii. 16). And although all his life long a good man will walk in fear of the judgment, yet this fear will notably increase as he draws near to the end of his days. It is said of Our Lord, that when the time of His death approached, He began to be sorrowful and to fear, and being in an agony, He prayed the longer. Was not this intended to teach us how it would be with us in our latter end, and what distress and anguish would overwhelm us?”

Such are the words of Pope St. Gregory, calculated to inspire not only sinners, but also the just with fear, since, as the saint says, even those who are
not conscious of having committed any grievous sins, are yet full of apprehension in regard to the sentence that will be passed on them. If the just are not devoid of alarm, what can we poor sinners do, who know ourselves to be guilty of many and manifold transgressions, and who every day add sin to sin? What will become of us? What can we do? Is there no means we can employ to obtain mercy of God? I know no better counsel than that which Christ Himself gives us in the words: "Watch ye therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke xxi. 36).

Since Christ points out to us prayer as the best and easiest means, let each one faithfully follow this exhortation and diligently call upon almighty God and His Blessed Mother, and all the saints, imploring them day by day to protect him, and commending to them his latter end.
CHAPTER V.

ON THE JUDGMENT.

Above and beyond all that we have hitherto considered as contributing to make death terrible to us, is the thought that we must stand before the judgment seat of God, and give an account of all we have done and left undone. How awful this judgment is, we learn from these words of St. Paul: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31). For if it is very alarming even to fall into the hands of an angry man, how much more terrible will it be to fall into the hands of an omnipotent God!

All the saints trembled in anticipation of the sentence that would be passed on them by God, for they well knew how exceedingly severe His judgments are. The Royal Psalmist says: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified" (Ps. cxlii. 2). And holy Job exclaims: "What shall I do if God arise to judge me? What am I that I should answer Him? I cannot answer Him one for a thousand."
On Death.

Again St. Paul says: "I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 4). We read also in the lives of the Fathers that the holy Abbot Agathon was overwhelmed with fear as his end drew near. His brethren said to him: "Why shouldst thou be afraid, reverend Father, thou hast led so pious a life?" But he answered them: "The judgments of God are very different from the judgments of man." The holy Abbot Elias used likewise to say: "There are three things that I fear. First I dread the moment when my soul has to leave my body; secondly, the moment when I must stand before the tribunal of God; thirdly, the moment when sentence is passed upon me." No one can fail to concur in the saying of this saintly man, for indeed, beside the general judgment, there is nothing so much to be apprehended as these three things. All good and holy men have feared them, all do fear them. Those who do not fear them, prove that they know very little about them, or have meditated scarcely at all upon them. For the benefit of one who may be so unenlightened, I will give a brief instruction on the subject.

Consider, first of all, what a strange new sensation it will be for thy soul, when she finds herself separated from the body, in an unknown world. Hitherto she has known no existence apart from the body; now she is suddenly separated from it.
Hitherto she was in time; now she has passed into eternity.

Now for the first time her eyes are opened, and she sees clearly what eternity is, what sin is, what virtue is, how infinite is the being of the Deity, and how wondrous is her own nature.

All this will appear so marvellous to her that she will be almost petrified with astonishment. After the first instant of wonder, she will be conducted before the tribunal of God, that she may give an account of all her actions; and the terror that will then seize upon the unhappy soul surpasses our powers of conception.

No wonder the hapless sinner shrinks from appearing before a tribunal where he will be convicted of all his misdeeds and severely punished for them! Would he not rather be thrown into a dark dungeon, and be fed on bread and water, than have to stand before this judgment seat and be put to open shame?

If it is so hateful to a criminal to be brought before an earthly magistrate, well may the poor soul quake with fear when she is introduced into the presence of God, the strict and omniscient Judge, and required to give the most accurate account of all the thoughts, words, deeds and omissions of her past life. Holy Job acknowledges this when he says: "Who will grant me this, that Thou mayst protect me in hell, and hide me till Thy wrath pass" (Job
xiv. 13). Observe that even the patient Job would rather lie in a darksome pit, and be concealed in a gloomy, sombre cave, than appear before the countenance of an angry God.

There are six things which strike terror into the soul, when she is summoned to the particular judgment.

(1) The soul fears because she knows her Judge to be omniscient; that nothing can be concealed from Him, nor can He be in any way deceived. (2) Because her Judge is omnipotent; nothing can withstand Him, and no one can escape from Him. (3) Because her Judge is not merely the most just, but the most strict of judges, to whom sin is so hateful that He will not allow the slightest transgression to pass unpunished. (4) Because the soul knows that God is not her judge alone, but also her accuser; she has provoked Him to anger, she has offended against Him, and He will defend His honor and avenge every insult offered to it. (5) Because the soul is aware that the sentence once uttered is irrevocable; there is no appeal for her to a higher court, it is useless for her to complain of the sentence. It cannot be reversed, and whether adverse or favorable she must needs accept it. (6) The most powerful reason of all why the soul fears to appear before the judgment seat is because she knows not what the sentence of the Judge will be. She has far more cause to fear than to hope. And
On the Judgment.

all thought of help is now over. Forever, forever lost; forever, forever damned! These six points fill the soul with such unspeakable anguish and terror, that were she mortal instead of immortal, she would be willing to die the most cruel and violent death as a means of escape.

Consider, furthermore, in what form thou wilt appear before thy Judge, and how thou wilt be put to confusion on account of thy sins. If a man in punishment of his evil deeds were sentenced to be stripped to the skin in presence of a whole multitude, how greatly ashamed he would feel! But if some loathsome and disgusting sore upon his body were thus disclosed to sight, he would be still more ashamed. Thus will it be with thee, when thou standest before thy Judge in the presence of many hosts of angels. Not merely will all thy wrong doings, thy thoughts, words and works be revealed, but all thy evil propensities will be made manifest to thee, and thou wilt be put to terrible shame because of them. Thou canst not deny that these evil proclivities cling to thee, for art thou not given to anger, impatience, revenge, hatred, envy, pride, vanity, sensuality, sloth, greediness, self-love, avarice, worldliness and all malice? These and other bad tendencies cleave to thy soul, and disfigure it so frightfully, that after death thou wilt be alarmed at the sight of thy own soul, and heartily ashamed of all the stains upon it.
Next consider in what manner thy holy Judge will receive thee, when thou appearest before Him not merely laden with a countless multitude of sins, but in a state of indescribable impurity. Thou wilt stand before Him in the greatest confusion, not knowing which way to look. Beneath thy feet hell lies; above thee is the angry countenance of thy Judge. Beside thee thou seest the demons who are there to accuse thee. In thy own interior thou beholdest all thy sins and misdeeds. It is impossible to hide thyself; and yet this exposure is intolerable.

This would be a fitting time to expound how the evil enemy will accuse thee, how he will bring all thy sins to light and call down upon them the vengeance of God; and also how the just God will demand the most accurate account of all thy actions. But this has so often formed the theme of preachers, that, for the sake of brevity, I will not enlarge on this part of my subject, but conclude with the following anecdote.

Two intimate friends agreed together that whichever of the two should die first, should appear to the survivor, provided he was permitted by God to do so. When at length one was removed by death, faithful to his promise he appeared to his friend, but with a sad and woebegone aspect, saying: "No man knows! no man knows! no man knows!" — "What is it that no one knows?" his friend asked.
And the spirit answered: "No one knows how strict are the judgments of God, and how severe His chastisements!"

These things being so, what does it behoove us to do, in order not to fall into the hands of a wrathful Judge? I can give thee no better counsel than this: Repent of thy sins, make a sincere confession, amend thy ways, and begin to think seriously about thy eternal salvation. Whilst thou art still in good health think sometimes of death, and prepare thyself for it. Do not postpone this until old age comes upon thee, or a mortal sickness overtakes thee. There is no greater, no more important art upon earth than the art of dying a good death. Upon this thy whole eternity depends; an eternity of surpassing felicity or of unutterable torment. Only one trial is accorded thee; if thou dost not stand this one trial, all is lost, an eternity of misery is before thee. And if thou hast not learned this all-important art in thy lifetime, when thou art well and strong, how canst thou practise it to thy eternal gain when upon thy death-bed? It will be utterly impossible for thee to do so unless God works a miracle of mercy on thy behalf. Thou canst not reckon upon this; God has not promised it nor hast thou deserved so great a favor. Therefore let me entreat thee to follow my friendly counsel, and prepare thyself frequently for death whilst in full health and strength; for this is the only means whereby thou
mayst hope to become proficient in the art of dying well, and pass successfully through the one trial that awaits thee, by which thy eternal destiny will be determined.
PART II.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE SIGNS THAT SHALL PRECEDE THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, who at His first coming appeared upon the earth in all stillness and tranquillity, under a gentle and attractive form, will come again the second time to judgment with great majesty and glory.

In order that His advent may not find us unprepared, He will send beforehand many and terrible signs to warn us to abandon our sinful life. Of these signs He Himself says: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For there shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the
beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved.” What an awful announcement! What a terrible prophecy!

Could there be any more terrible prediction made to us than this which comes from the lips of eternal Truth? When God was about to destroy the city of Jerusalem, He announced its downfall by several signs. A comet, resembling a fiery sword, blazed over the city, and hosts of armed warriors were seen contending in the air. Jerusalem might at the last moment have interpreted aright these signs and done penance unto salvation. But Jerusalem knew not the time of its visitation. If God caused such wondrous signs to appear before the destruction of one single city, will He not announce the approaching end of the world, and the chastisements that are to come upon it, by awful and terrific signs? There is therefore every reason to believe, that a considerable time before the Last Day, fearful signs will appear in all lands in the heavens. This Christ appears to indicate in the words: “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.” These signs will become more numerous day by day, and men will be struck with such terror, that if God did not shorten those days, even the very elect would begin to despair. Then,
as St. Jerome says, the heavens will be overcast with heavy clouds, and a dreadful tempest will arise. The force of the wind will carry the inhabitants of the earth off their feet, and whirl them aloft in the air; trees will be uprooted, houses unroofed. Long peals of thunder will resound in the heavens, the flashes of lightning, like serpents of fire, will light up the sky, and with their forked tongues, playing about the dwellings of mankind, will kindle a general conflagration, amid the crash of thunder. The waters of the ocean will be so agitated that their waves will rise mountain-high, towering almost to the clouds. The roaring and raging of the storm-swept billows will last for some time. All the beasts of the earth will lift up their voice, and their dismal howls will fill the air, so that the hearts of men will stand still for terror.

Yet this is but the beginning of sorrow, Our Lord tells us. What will next occur He describes in these words: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved.”

This darkening of the sun will take place in the full light of midday. And as its golden rays enlightening the face of nature rejoice both man and beast, so the sudden withdrawal of its light will cause sorrow and distress to the whole of creation. And this all the more, because the moon will cease
to shine, and her gentle, peaceful light will no longer illuminate the shades of night. All the stars also which bespangle the firmament and cast a glimmering to earth, will disappear from their accustomed place. This awful darkness will strike such alarm and anguish to the heart of all living creatures, both men and brutes, that the mourning and lamentation will be universal. With the wail of distress ascending from the dwellers upon earth, the howls of the evil spirits in the air will mingle in hideous concert, for they will perceive from these signs that the Day of Judgment is at hand; they know that they will soon have to appear before the rigorous tribunal of God; they know they will be cast down to hell for all eternity. Hence their fury, their rage, and frantic raving.

Here we may repeat the words spoken by Christ: “This is but the beginning of sorrow,” and we may add, there will be no end to it. For after the terrific darkness all will be upset and in disorder, and the elements will be let loose, so that men will fear lest the heavens should fall and the earth sink from beneath their feet. This is what Christ means when He says: “The powers of heaven shall be moved and the stars shall fall from heaven.” For in accordance with the divine will, the firmament with all its stars, the sun with its attendant planets, the atmosphere with its veil of clouds, will be so mightily shaken and made to tremble, that appalling
The Signs that shall Precede the Last Judgment.

sounds of crashing, breaking, fearful explosions, will everywhere be heard. The stars will be driven from their orbits, and thus the great powers of heaven will conflict with one another.

What will the feelings be of the man who lives through events such as these? How all mankind, all created beings, will mourn! Christ Himself tells us this will be so: "Upon earth will be distress of nations by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world" (Luke xxi. 25, 26). And in another place He says: "There shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 21, 22). Our Lord could have used no stronger expression to describe the utter misery of unhappy mortals, than by saying, they shall wither away for fear, and apprehension of the things that are yet to come upon the world. How is it possible for the men who shall be alive at that time not to despond, not to despair, in presence of such fathomless misery? Even the faith and courage of an apostle would be sorely tried to bear up against such unspeakable wretchedness. All men will have the appearance of one who has seen a ghost. Their hair will stand on end, their knees will strike together, they will quake with
fear, their terror will deprive them of the power of speech, their hearts will die within them for tribulation, they will lose reason and consciousness, no one will help his neighbor, no one will comfort his neighbor, no one will so much as exchange a word with his neighbor; only they will all unite in weeping and wailing, and fly to hide themselves in the caves of the earth.

When this lamentation has lasted for a time, the God of justice will put an end to their misery, and all that is beneath the firmament of heaven shall be destroyed by fire. For fire will fall down from heaven, and ignite everything with which it comes in contact. In many places also flames will spring up out of the ground, and terrify unhappy mortals to such an extent that they will not know how to escape from them. Some will seek shelter in cellars and caverns, others will immerse themselves in rivers and lakes. The devouring flames will spread so fast that the forests will be set on fire, and the towns and villages will be included in the destruction. At length the whole earth will be on fire and a general conflagration will ensue, such as never has been seen or heard of. The heat of the raging flames will be so intense that the stones and rocks will melt, and the sea and all waters upon the earth will boil and hiss. All men then living, every beast upon the land and every fish in the sea will be destroyed in this universal conflagration. Thus the
The Signs that shall Precede the Last Judgment.

whole world will be brought to a terrible end, and everything on this earth will be either consumed or purified by the fire. After this has happened, the appearance of the earth will be completely changed.
CHAPTER II.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

The reader will perhaps not take what has been said in the preceding chapter much to heart, because he cherishes the hope that he will not be alive during that awful period. But what we are now about to speak of concerns every one, whoever he may be. Wherefore let him read it attentively and ponder it seriously.

The first event that will follow upon the end of the world is the general resurrection of the dead. All men, whoever they may be, and whenever and wherever they have lived, not excepting infants whose existence has been but one brief moment, will rise again.

With the solemn blast of a trumpet God will cause all men to be summoned to the Last Judgment. Concerning this Christ says: “He shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them” (Matt. xxiv. 31). And St. Paul says: “We shall indeed all rise again, but we shall not
all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52).

After the vast conflagration God will send out His angels, who will blow so mighty a blast upon their trumpet, that it will re-echo throughout the whole world. The sound of this trumpet will be so solemn that it will cause the earth to tremble. Its powerful voice will awaken the dead, calling on them: "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! Arise ye dead, and come to judgment! Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!" Loud, continuous, and most solemn will be the blast of that trumpet.

How terrified all the evil spirits and the souls of the lost will be when they hear this call! They will howl and mourn, for the fatal hour has come at last, the hour they have looked forward to so long, and with such unutterable dread. There will be such a commotion in hell, such raving and raging and fury, that one might imagine the devils were all tearing one another to pieces. "Alas, alas!" they will shriek in their despair. "How can we possibly stand before the countenance of our angry Judge! How can we possibly endure the shame, the agony that will be our portion! Could we only remain here, how gladly would we do so, great as are the torments we have now to endure!" But vain are all their wishes, futile are all their struggles.
They cannot choose, but must obey the voice of the trumpet. The general resurrection begins while its sound still re-echoes over the whole globe. Do not pause to ask how this can be, for we know that it will be so, on the irrefragable authority of God's omnipotence and His word which cannot deceive. However long ago the body of a man may have crumbled into dust, whatever changes it may have passed through, every portion and every particle will unite to form again the same body which was his during his lifetime. "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up their dead that were in them" (Apoc. xx. 13).

Consider this solemn truth, O Christian, for it concerns thee closely. As certainly as thou now livest, so certainly wilt thou one day rise again from the grave. Place this awful moment vividly before thee. Even if thou wert pious, and shouldst end thy days in the grace of God, yet, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture and of the Catholic Church, fear and trembling will lay hold upon thee. Considering how inconceivably rigorous God will be in His judgment of men, even the just will have cause to fear in appearing before His tribunal, as we shall presently show. And if good and just men are afraid, what will be the fear that thou, poor sinner, wilt feel, when the trumpet calls thee to judgment? Therefore amend thy ways, and make thy peace now with thy strict Judge, by works of penance,
while there is yet time. Now in order that thou mayst prepare thyself for that terrible hour of resurrection, we will describe first the resurrection of the good, and then that of the reprobate.

Awakened by the solemn sound of the trumpet all the souls of the just will come down from heaven, and, accompanied by their guardian angels, betake themselves to the spot where their remains were interred. The graves will be open, and in them the bodies will be seen lying, incorrupt but yet lifeless. The body of every good man will rest in the grave as if he were asleep; it will be blooming as a rose, fragrant as a lily, shining as a star, fair as an angel and perfect in every member. What will the soul say when she beholds the body appertaining to her lying before her in such beauty? She will say: "Hail, blessed and beloved body, how I rejoice once more to rejoin thee! How lovely thou art, how glorious, how pleasing, how fragrant! Come to me, that I may be wedded to thee for all eternity." Then through the power of God the body will be reunited to the soul, and in that same instant return to life.

O my God, what will be the astonishment of the body when it finds itself alive again, and moulded in so beauteous a form! Soul and body will greet each other lovingly and embrace each other affectionately with heartfelt emotion. The soul will speak thus to the body: "How earnestly I have longed for thee, how I have desired to see this day! Now I will
conduct thee to the regions of heavenly bliss that we may rejoice together for evermore." And the body will answer: "Welcome, dearest soul; it is indeed a heartfelt joy to me to be with thee again. The greater the pain our past separation caused me, the greater the delight our present reunion affords."

Then the soul will speak again, and say to the body: "Blessed be thou, my chosen companion, who hast been so faithful to me. Blessed be thy senses and all thy members, for they have ever abstained from evil." And the body will reply: "Be thou rather blessed, O dearest soul, for it was by thy instigation I did so, and thou didst incite me to all that was good. It is to thee that I owe my present felicity, therefore I praise and magnify thee, and I will praise and magnify thee to all eternity."

Thus body and soul will rejoice together with inexpressible satisfaction.

Then the holy guardian angels will congratulate these blessed beings and exult with them over their joyous resurrection. In all cemeteries, and places where many persons are buried, the blessed will arise first with resplendent glorified bodies. That they will take the precedence over the others may be gathered from Christ's words, when He says: "Wonder not at this; for the hour cometh, wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth to the resurrection of life; but they