



<sup>51</sup> Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. <sup>55</sup> O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:51-57)

Mankind, and sadly many Christian as well, are fixated on the looming Spectre of Death to which each and all must answer at the far end of our journey. For the reprobate and recalcitrant sinner, death comes as a night without end being cast out into outer darkness to suffer the absolute absence of God's comforting Presence (for sin separates finally and eternally the lost soul from his Maker). But death is no terror to those who walk as the chosen of God in Christ. In fact, the Angel of Death comes as a Harbinger of Comfort, sweet repose, and Rescue to those who long for the soon appearing of their Lord.

It seems likely that the seasoned saint and the innocent babe are surrounded by an angelic host who stand at the ready to escort a precious soul into Paradise as the last spark of life is extinguished. But the damned receive no such escort but are, instead, committed to the dust of the earth. Jesus gave us a peek of this truth in a Parable: <sup>19</sup> *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:* <sup>20</sup> *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,* <sup>21</sup> *And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.* <sup>22</sup> *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;* <sup>23</sup> *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* (Luke 16:19-23)

It is true we all face the moment of dying. But does this confute the very words of our Lord? <sup>25</sup> *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead,*

*yet shall he live:* <sup>26</sup> *And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* (John 11:25-26) It depends on your correct understanding of the meaning of death. Death, by definition, is the final and eternal cessation of life and conscious awareness. But if we believe the promises of the resurrection made sure by Christ, we must admit that death is only a transitory state – actually, merely a sleep in a borrowed bed of dust. It should be noted that every soul created by God is granted an eternity of existence – those deemed righteous by virtue of the redeeming blood of Christ will spend that eternity in the presence of God and His angels; the residue of those who are damned will spend eternity in a far distant place – HELL!

Death is, as Paul says in our leading text: *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* I love the phrase, *In the twinkling of an eye.* That one phrase covers a wealth of meaning to the pilgrims of the Lord.

You may remember the days of your early childhood when you played with seeming endless energy until your mother called you in at night. Once play was no longer an option, you felt your exhaustion with reluctant resignation. Retiring to bed, you fell almost immediately into a deep and still sleep – so still that even dreams could not break through. You closed your eyes and opened them immediately it seemed; but now the first rays of the morning sun were breaking through your bedroom window. You were conscious of no time elapsing between the visitation of the Sandman and your awakening.

The same sensation is experienced by those who undergo anesthesia. In the deep sleep of death, there is no conscious passage of time. Falling asleep in death is merely a temporary sound sleep like unto a *twinkling of the eye* whether an hour or a millennium.

To be precise about death, there can be no true life except this kernel of flesh die and be raised up in abundance of life and fruit: <sup>35</sup> *But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?* <sup>36</sup> *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened (made alive), except it die: <sup>37</sup> And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: <sup>38</sup> But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.* (1 Cor 15:35-38) Death is merely a rite of passage from mortality to immortality.

I hesitated to quote our old friend Shakespeare again so close to our devotion of yesterday in which he played a prominent role; but the words he put into the mouth of Prince Hamlet are very apropos to our discussion:

*To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer  
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,  
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep  
No more; and by a sleep, to say we end  
The Heart-ache, and the thousand Natural shocks  
That Flesh is heir to? 'Tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,  
To sleep, perchance to Dream; aye, there's the rub,  
For in that sleep of death, what dreams  
may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause.*

The earthly sleep of the saint differs itself from the sleep of the sin-laden conscience that belabors the sleep of the damned. But so is the transitory sleep of death. One (the saint) wakes up in the bosom of Abraham; and the other (the damned) wakes up in the dark and desponding fires of Hell. Just as the sleep of an honest laborer on earth is temporary, so is the sleep of death of the child of God temporary.

The sleep of death is also a spiritual rest. Remember that the Lord rested over the Sabbath in the Borrowed Tomb before His Resurrection. It is now the case that Christ is our Ark of Salvation just as He was for Abraham and the seed of Promise. If we are in Him, we see no true death for death cannot exist in the presence of Christ having been defeated by Him at Calvary. A man in the rest of natural sleep will awaken at the time of refreshing from a restful sleep. He may be awakened by other men at their beckon and call; so may the man who sleeps in the sleep of death be awakened at the time of refreshing at the beckon and call of the Lord Himself.

That divine sleep of the saints is so complete and sound that even dreams are not likely to intrude. What a disappointment would dreams be compared to the joyous scene of our awakening!

We all have a bed for our future sleeping – the cardinal question that begs an answer is this: Where will that sleep be, in Heaven or in Hell?