

(1.23) Meditation Upon Death

Time passes so quickly and some day it will be all over with you here. Are you prepared for the next life? *As for a human person-- his days are like grass, he blooms like the wild flowers; as soon as the wind blows he is gone, never to be seen there again.*¹ And when he perishes he is out of the thoughts of others. The thoughts of the human heart too often dwell on the present instead of preparing for those which are to come. You should prioritize yourself in all things just as though you were to die today. If your conscience is pure you need not fear death. It is always better to avoid sin and wrongdoing remembering that if you are not prepared this day how will it be for you the next? Tomorrow is uncertain and no one knows if there will be one for them.

Of what use is a long life if we amend ourselves so little? A long life is not necessarily conducive to positive changes as contentment can lead to carelessness. Are we able to spend even one day in perfection? Many count the years since their conversion but too often our amendment does not match those years. If death is a fearful thing then danger may increase with longer life. The man who realizes that death can come at any time and so is always ready for it is indeed blessed. If you have seen a person die remember you too will travel the same path. In the morning realize it is possible that you will die that evening; in the evening don't depend that you will be alive in the morning. Hence, always be ready so that it does not take you by surprise. *Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*² When you are in your last hours your past life may appear quite differently as you realize the many opportunities you have missed for improvement. The man who will have no such qualms will indeed be happy and lives not by worldly values but desires advancement in virtue, welcomes discipline, understands when penance is needed, is an obedient servant, and accepts adversity in building up the Kingdom of God. *Such a man proves himself as an authentic servant of God by resolute perseverance in times of hardships, difficulties and distress.*³

You are capable of many good deeds and works when healthy but illness will certainly slow you down and possibly bring many of your actions to a halt. Most people are hindered by sickness and seldom will you grow in holiness just by going on a pilgrimage. Do not depend upon friends and neighbors to take care of your soul after you are gone as you will be forgotten sooner than you think. Make provisions now while you still live and let your good works go before you rather than put trust in the help of others after your death. If you do not take care of yourself now who will take care of you afterwards? It is the Lord who helps us on the day of salvation⁴ and we are reminded how precious our time is at the moment. Think now of how you can make better use of time that leads to eternal life. There may come a time when you would seek another hour or another day but will it be granted to you? Be mindful and even fearful of death and there will be times this will free you from danger. Meditate on how to live now so that in the

¹ Psalm 103:15

² Matt 24:44

³ 2 Cor 6:4

⁴ 2 Cor 6:2

hour of death fear will dissipate and rejoicing emerge. Die to worldly values and *you will live in Christ.*⁵ Detach yourself from the world and you may go freely to Christ Jesus. Be penitent when you see the need and you will gain self-confidence. Don't count on living long when you cannot be sure what will happen tomorrow.

Many thinking they would live long have encountered sudden and unexpected death. Think of the wealthy man who planned to build new barns in his abundance and *God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.*⁶ How often have you heard of someone being hit by a car, or in an airplane accident, or drowning, or a heart attack, or some sudden unexpected illness? Death is then the end of all as we know of it, *it is like a flower that blossoms and withers, fleeting as a shadow, transient.*⁷

Who will remember you after you are gone from this world? Who will pray for you? So be vigilant, do all you can do now as you do not know the time of your death, nor do you exactly know what will befall you at that time. Meditate upon your salvation and concern yourself only with things above. *Store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal.*⁸

Make friends with the Saints, imitate their virtuous lives, then they will receive you into their heavenly abode. Keep clear of worldly entanglements, *keep yourselves free from the disordered natural inclinations that attack the soul,*⁹ for the Kingdom you seek is not of this world; keep a clear conscience and look to the higher things for your place is not here. *There is no permanent city for us here; we are looking for the one which is yet to be.*¹⁰

Be prayerful, repentant, so that after death the Lord will joyfully welcome your spirit.



This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 23 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal (layperson's) reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

<http://melkaplace.com>

⁵ Romans 6:8

⁶ Luke 12:16-21

⁷ Job 14:2

⁸ Matthew 6:20

⁹ 1Peter 2:11

¹⁰ Hebrews 13:14