

a part of your heart, till at length you throw up your hands, open your whole heart to him, and now experience with joy that he really in Christ has made his abode in you. This is the continuous Christmas gospel. Not a Christmas gospel that remains standing by the manger, but such an one as passes over from the manger into your own heart. First the jubilant note of the apostolate: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." And then the song of praise on the part of God's saint: "The Word was made flesh, and has taken up his abode in mine own heart."

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"WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT THEE?"

Refreshment of grace is particularly rich when also in departing from this world the soul is privileged to be near unto God. On the death-bed highest bliss has often been enjoyed. Many have departed, not only strong in faith and in higher clearness of mind, but also with the foretaste of heavenly joy. No rule can be made for this. A blessed death-bed is not always the reward of holier-mindedness and of deeper spirituality. A death bed that enhances the glory of God has not infrequently been the portion of one who in life had wandered far away from his Lord. And on the other hand painful distress has been witnessed on the part of those who for many years had known the secret walk with God.

As a rule this depends upon all sorts of things that have nothing to do with a devout frame of mind and heart. First upon age, temperament,

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the nature of disease, degree of weakness, state of nerves, freedom of speech or diffidence, and upon the longer or shorter period of dying. In part, it also depends upon the physician. Whether he conceals the certainty, or at least the probability of the approaching end, or whether frankly and honestly he acquaints the patient with the exact state of things. Again it depends upon family and friends, and upon those who care for the sick, whether they are spiritually inclined, and assist the patient in holy meditations, or whether they provide so-called diversion and vex him with multifarious earthly concerns.

If it happens that all this co-operates for good, and that he who is about to appear before God lies for a few days at least with a waiting heart at the gate of eternity, watching for its opening unto him, and meanwhile bearing witness to the power of everlasting life, sometimes in terms which far excel ordinary speech—then special grace operates in such a dying person. The Lord truly imparts this special grace to comfort his dying saint, but mostly to glorify himself, and to cause a testimony of striking power to go out from so glorious a death-bed.

The desire to pose as a saint is a sin which in its more refined forms cleaves to all religion. It has even been observed in martyrs. This desire would be more generally in evidence if the Lord God did not prevent it by weakness and disease. And in this prevention of making a show of one's piety we are bound to appreciate grace. But sometimes dying grace shows itself in a higher form, when something of almost prophetic inspiration takes hold of a dying saint. This was strongly

evident in the case of Jacob the patriarch. But though in lesser measure, occasionally such higher inspiration is still witnessed among us when it is not merely a dying in faith, not merely a falling asleep in Jesus, but when fully awake and with open eye it is a triumphant passing through the gate of eternity. In such a case there is clear consciousness, and from it a holy testimony, because he who dies knows and feels until his latest breath, that he is near unto God.

But from this it may not be inferred that a less triumphant death implies that the soul was deprived of God's nearness. Bodily weakness all too often affects the mind, so that little is observed from without of what inwardly takes place in the spirit. God is able to do, O, so much in and for the soul of which a third person can have no knowledge. When an infant is carried from the cradle to the grave, no one can say that God was not able to minister grace to him. But no one saw anything of it. The little one himself knew nothing about it. The same can take place in sleep. Would anyone say, that while we sleep, God's ministry is excluded for seven or eight hours from our heart? In great sickness sometimes one can be unconscious for several days together. Would God, then, all those days stand powerless before this disabled soul? The point in case of the infant, in sleep or in sickness is, that gracious ministry can take place on the part of the Holy Ghost, which through physical causes can not be observed from without, but remains concealed within.

This physical hindrance occurs in most cases by far when the end draws near. Most strongly in

the case of those who die unconsciously in a swoon; sometimes very strongly with the sick, whose pulse is almost gone, and whose breath can scarcely be felt. And of these no one may say that, on account of this, their soul passed away in secret, and was estranged from God. Omnipotence and grace are able to do in holy secrecy what can not be observed by human eye or ear. The consciousness of him who died depended from the nature of the case upon the strength that still operated in his brain. But suppose the brain refused, should the inner life of the soul on this account be deprived of grace? Presently the brain shall refuse to function altogether, when without a clouded mind the soul shall know and glorify God. "To be near unto God" in dying, even if not discerned by any outside person is nothing else than already an entrance here in part upon that which after death becomes altogether and wholly so; the beginning of the new condition, when separated from the body, entirely incorporeal, our person is and companies with God.

But apart from this, while we continue our pilgrim journey on earth, the Divine ministries in behalf of the dying are deeply significant to us as a *memento mori*. This is what Asaph's message implied: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" (Ps.73:25). By itself this means to know nothing in heaven but God, which is quite the same as to love God with all the mind and soul and heart. But Asaph's question puts the matter still more clearly before us. The struggle of our heart on earth is, that it goes out after all sorts of things, including God. This struggle is laid upon us, inasmuch as God himself has related our heart

to all sorts of persons on earth, and has endowed it with powers to appreciate the glories of nature, and has imparted all sorts of inclinations and callings to us, which go out after visible things. The Stylist who withdraws his eyes from all earthly things, so that with nothing about him but air he might seek after God, evades the struggle and becomes unnatural. The holy art of the child of God is to possess things that are seen and handled in such a way, that he can truly say, that nothing on earth pleases him but God. This only means to say, that he only regards all visible things as things which are of God, and exist for the sake of God, and must serve God. Thus his pleasure in God embraces and includes all these other things. But in such a way that they are only considered insofar as they are subjected to God, and as they reveal his Divine power.

Whether in deed and in truth this is the case with us, becomes evident only in dying. For then all these things fall away from us, and God alone remains. It has been tried to transfer earthly desires into heaven, by picturing all sorts of other persons and means of enjoyment there by the side of God. Mohammedans go farthest in this. But among Christians not a few regard heaven first of all in connection with their own dead, that there they might resume with them the former life. Thus even in heaven they imagine a whole world again by the side of God. This confuses the spirits. For he alone who in dying expects nothing in heaven but God, shall also find in the Fatherhouse, through and under God, that other holy fellowship. But this shall have no

other purport than the better to glorify the God and Father of all in Christ.

This same thing must here be applied to our secret walk with God. We must frequently ask ourselves: If you had nothing, absolutely nothing aside from God, would your soul be perfectly satisfied? When you seek and endeavor and strive to be near unto God, is it that you might rest in him with all your heart, or is it perhaps merely that you might find in him the helper, who can give you all sorts of other desired things after which your heart goes out really the more strongly? Let no one complain that he who has God and him alone, has nothing but God. For he who has God in him has everything. But that you might test the sincerity of your own personal piety, you should know for yourself whether you are so concerned about God, that though all other things are added, you are intent upon him alone. Or, whether your heart really seeks the other things, and in addition to them God, through whose help you might obtain them the more surely. Or finally, whether you want to become a partaker of God and with him of the other things?

And in behalf of this test, anticipation of the hour of death has uncommon value. That you imagine to yourself the moment when everything on earth shall fall away from you, and as far as you are concerned, shall cease to exist. That whether, when you enter upon the thought that you will have nothing in heaven forever but the Triune God, it lifts your heart up to the highest foretaste of holy joy, in the sense that in all honesty you can say that it is good for you "to

be near unto God", because you have nothing beside him in heaven, and because you desire nothing beside him on earth, all the days of your pilgrim journey that still remain.

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**"AS THE HART PANTETH AFTER THE
WATER BROOKS."**

More than twenty centuries have not been able to darken the golden glow of the immortal song that has come to us in Psalm 42. And with all the bitter estrangement from God that characterizes human life, the priests of art still unite with the redeemed of the Lord in giving the song of "The hart that panteth after the water-brooks" a place which is far above every other lyric that voices the deep longing of the human heart after the fountain of all blessing. The passion that thrills in this Psalm, the enthusiasm that breathes in this glorious song is striking. Our most blessed experience is "To be near unto God." And in the face of distraction and temptation, our fainting soul can turn away from the world unto God, inasmuch as a voice whispers within that he who forsakes God robs his own heart of peace.

We have often turned to God and have knocked at the door, to be admitted again to the secret walk with God, after we had made the discovery in hours or days of wandering, that the joy of the world is vain and that its glory is deceptive. At another time we have, as it were, allowed our heart to be taken to God by one who "holy and humble of heart" allured us back to God. At another time again, either a wounded heart or