THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



Preparing for a Holy Death

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Living Now in View of Eternity

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INTRODUCTION

The One Appointment You Will Keep

There is one appointment on every man's calendar that he will certainly keep, though its date is hidden from him: the hour of his death. He may miss every other engagement, but this one he will attend, and everything he is and has done will be gathered up into it. And yet it is the one appointment a man spends his whole life refusing to think about, treating death as a morbid subject to be avoided, a rumor he half believes applies to other people. This avoidance is understandable, but it is also a grave practical mistake, because the one certain fact of a man's future is the one he most needs to prepare for, and the quality of his death, and of the eternity it opens onto, depends largely on whether he prepared.

This book is about that preparation. It is not a morbid book, though it speaks frankly of death; it is, in the end, a hopeful one, because for the Christian death is not the end but a passage, and a well-prepared death is the gateway to eternal joy. But the preparation must be made, and it is made not chiefly on the deathbed, where a man may have little capacity left, but across the whole of his life, in the way he lives now. The great paradox the saints understood is that preparing for death is not the enemy of living well but its very condition, that the man who has made his peace with his mortality is freed to live more fully, more wisely, and more fearlessly than the man who spends his life fleeing the thought of it.

Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. — Psalm 90:12

We will begin with the wisdom of facing death honestly and why the avoidance of it impoverishes a man's life. We will see how keeping death in view actually clarifies how to live, ordering a man's priorities around what will finally matter. We will take up the particular grace of dying in the state of grace and the Church's provisions for a holy death. We will consider how to face the fear of death and find real peace with our mortality, and how to care for others as they die. And we will see that preparing for a holy death is finally the same thing as living a holy life, so that the man who prepares well to die is simply the man who lives well now, in view of the eternity toward which his whole life is moving.

CHAPTER ONE

The Wisdom of Facing Death

Why the Avoidance Impoverishes Us

Our culture has made the avoidance of death into an art form, hiding it away in hospitals and care homes, dressing it in euphemisms, pushing it to the far edge of consciousness, and treating any serious contemplation of it as unhealthy. This denial is nearly universal and feels like wisdom, a sensible refusal to dwell on the morbid. But it is in fact a profound foolishness, because a man cannot prepare for what he will not think about, and the refusal to face death does not abolish it but only ensures that it finds him unprepared. The first step toward a holy death is simply the honesty to acknowledge that one is going to die.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. — Ecclesiastes 7:2

The Great Denial

The denial of death runs so deep in us that it operates mostly below the level of conscious thought, a settled refusal to really believe, deep down, that we ourselves will die. A man may acknowledge his mortality in the abstract, agree that all men are mortal, and go right on living as though he personally were the exception, making his plans as if his time were unlimited, investing himself in things as if he would never have to leave them. This is not a failure of information, for everyone knows the fact; it is a failure of realization, a refusal to let the known fact sink in and shape how one lives. And it is actively encouraged by a culture that finds death embarrassing and inconvenient, that keeps the dying out of sight and the thought of death at bay, so that a man can go for years without ever seriously confronting the one thing most certain to happen to him. The great denial feels like psychological health, but it is actually a kind of sleepwalking, a life lived in willful ignorance of its own most important fact.

What Death Teaches the Living

The ancient wisdom, by contrast, held that the honest contemplation of death is one of the most clarifying and life-giving things a man can do, which is why Scripture counsels that it is better to spend time in the house of mourning than the house of feasting. The sober remembrance of death, what the tradition called keeping death before one's eyes, does not depress a man who practices it rightly but awakens him, cutting through the trivialities that consume most of his attention and revealing what actually matters. A man who truly grasps that his time is limited and that he will have to give an account stops wasting his life on what cannot last and starts investing it in what will; he holds his possessions more loosely, forgives more readily, loves more urgently, and orders his life around its real end. This is why the saints kept death deliberately in view, not out of

morbidity but out of wisdom, understanding that the remembrance of death is among the most powerful aids to living well, a constant corrective to the illusions that would otherwise swallow a man's brief and precious life.

Honesty Is the Beginning of Preparation

The practical point is that a man cannot prepare for a holy death while refusing to think about death at all, and so the honest acknowledgment of his mortality is the necessary first step, the opening of the door through which all further preparation comes. This acknowledgment need not be grim or obsessive; it is simply the mature acceptance of a fact, the willingness to say plainly to oneself, I am going to die, I do not know when, and I had better be ready. Once a man has said this honestly and let it sink in, everything changes: death moves from a rumor he avoids to a reality he prepares for, and the whole project of living in view of eternity becomes possible. The man who will not take this first step, who keeps death permanently at arm's length, cannot prepare for it and is, despite his apparent prudence, the truly foolish one, building his whole life on the pretense that its one certain event will never come. Honesty about death is where wisdom begins, and it is the gateway to a preparation that can transform not only a man's dying but his living.

CHAPTER TWO

Living in View of the End

How Mortality Clarifies Life

Once a man stops fleeing the thought of death and begins to keep it honestly in view, a remarkable thing happens: his life comes into focus. The awareness of mortality is not a cloud that darkens a man's days but a light that clarifies them, revealing what matters and what does not with a sharpness that the man lost in the illusion of unlimited time can never attain. Learning to live in view of the end is therefore not a preparation for dying only but a transformation of living, and it is one of the great practical fruits of facing death honestly.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. — Psalm 90:12

The Clarifying Power of the End

Nothing clarifies a man's priorities like the awareness that his time is finite and will end, because the prospect of the end forces the question of what actually matters. A man who imagines his time unlimited spends it carelessly, investing himself in trifles, deferring

what is important, assuming there will always be more time to attend to the things that count. But a man who knows his days are numbered asks the sharper question that the end imposes: of all the things I could give my brief life to, which will I be glad to have given it to when I stand at the end and look back? This question, asked honestly, reorders everything. It exposes the vanity of much that a man chases, the wealth and status and comfort that death strips away, and reveals the worth of what endures, the love given and received, the good done, the soul prepared for God. To live in view of the end is to let this clarifying question operate continually, measuring one's days against their final accounting, and so to be saved from squandering one's life on what will not matter when the end comes.

Investing in What Lasts

The man who lives in view of eternity naturally begins to invest his life differently, shifting his effort from what death destroys to what death cannot touch. Much of what the world prizes and most men pursue, the accumulation of money and possessions, the climbing of status, the gratification of appetites, is precisely what death renders worthless, for a man takes none of it with him and it profits him nothing at the judgment. What lasts, what a man carries through death into eternity, is of an entirely different kind: the love he has given, the good he has done, the holiness he has grown in, the souls he has helped toward God. A man awake to his mortality learns to invest in these, to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on an earth he will shortly leave, and this is not otherworldly escapism but the soundest possible investment strategy, the only one that accounts for the full term rather than cashing out at death with empty hands. The remembrance of death is thus a constant financial advisor of the soul, steering a man away from investments that death will wipe out and toward those that will pay eternal dividends.

Urgency Without Anxiety

Living in view of the end gives a man a certain holy urgency, a sense that his time matters and must not be wasted, and yet this urgency, rightly held, is free of anxiety, because it rests in trust. The man who knows his days are numbered does not therefore live in frantic fear, cramming and grasping against the closing deadline; rather he lives with a calm purposefulness, attending to what matters, not deferring the important, making his life count, while leaving the timing in God's hands. This is the balance the saints struck: a serious urgency about using well the time they were given, combined with a deep peace about its length and its end, because they trusted the One who held it. A man can live this way, taking his mortality seriously enough to be spurred to use his time well, while trusting God enough not to be consumed by anxiety about it. The awareness of death,

held in trust, produces neither the careless sloth of the man who thinks he has forever nor the frantic grasping of the man who fears the end, but the steady, purposeful, peaceful diligence of the man who knows his time is limited and precious and held securely in the hands of God.

A homely picture captures the balance. A man on a journey with a fixed arrival time does not refuse to think about the destination, nor does he spend the whole trip in a panic about it; he simply keeps it in mind, which shapes how he travels, what he does with the hours, what he makes sure to finish before he arrives. The awareness of death works the same way for the one who holds it rightly. It is not a shadow over the journey but an orientation within it, the quiet knowledge of where the road leads that keeps a man from wasting the trip and lets him arrive, when he arrives, with his work done and his heart at peace. Lived this way, the thought of death does not darken a man's days; it gives them direction.

CHAPTER THREE

Dying in the State of Grace

The One Thing That Matters at the End

For all that can be said about preparing for death, it comes down finally to one thing: that a man die in the state of grace, in friendship with God, his soul alive with the divine life. Everything else about a man's death, whether it is peaceful or painful, sudden or slow, early or late, is secondary to this one thing, because this one thing determines not merely how he dies but where he spends eternity. To prepare for a holy death is, above all, to prepare to die in the state of grace, and a man who grasps this orders his whole preparation around it.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord… that they may rest from their labors. — Revelation 14:13

The State of the Soul at Death

The decisive thing about a man's death is the state of his soul at the moment he meets God, whether he dies in the state of grace, with the divine life alive in him, or in the state of mortal sin, with that life driven out. The Church teaches that a man's eternal destiny is sealed at death in accordance with the state in which he dies: the soul that dies in grace, in friendship with God, is destined for eternal life, while the soul that dies in unrepented mortal sin, having definitively rejected God, faces eternal separation from him. This is

why dying in the state of grace is the one thing that finally matters, the single most important fact about any man's death, beside which all other circumstances of his dying pale. A peaceful, comfortable death in mortal sin is an infinite tragedy; a painful, difficult death in the state of grace is an eternal triumph. The whole of preparing for a holy death, therefore, converges on this: ensuring, as far as a man can, that when his hour comes, his soul is alive with grace and at peace with God.

Why You Cannot Count on the Deathbed

A man might suppose he can defer this preparation to the deathbed, planning to repent and set things right at the end, but this is among the most dangerous of all presumptions, for several reasons. Death may come suddenly, with no deathbed at all, no warning, no time to prepare, as it does for many; a man who has gambled on a final repentance may simply not get the chance. Even where death comes slowly, a man may be unconscious, delirious, or so consumed by pain and fear that he has little capacity for the serious work of repentance and reconciliation. And more deeply, a man dies as he has lived; the habits of a lifetime do not reverse at the end, and the man who has spent his life refusing to repent is unlikely to find, suddenly, the grace and will to do at death what he would never do before. To count on a deathbed conversion is to stake one's eternity on a series of favorable conditions none of which one can guarantee, and the saints uniformly warned against it. The only safe preparation is to live now in the state of grace, so that whenever death comes, sudden or slow, conscious or not, it finds a man already ready.

None of this is meant to drive a man to despair over the thief who repented on the cross at the last moment, for God's mercy is real and can reach a soul at the very end. The point is not that a deathbed conversion is impossible, but that it is a thing no man may presume upon or plan around, a mercy to hope for if one is caught short, never a strategy to rely on by design. To arrange one's whole life on the assumption that one will repent at the end is to treat God's mercy as a loophole and to gamble one's eternity on conditions entirely outside one's control. The wise man does not count on being the good thief; he lives so that, whenever his cross comes, he is already turned toward the Lord, and has no desperate last reversal to attempt because he made his peace long before.

Living Ready

The practical conclusion is both simple and demanding: the way to prepare to die in the state of grace is to live in the state of grace, habitually and now, so that one is always ready to meet God. This means keeping short accounts with God through frequent Confession, so that a man is rarely long in a state of serious sin and is quickly reconciled when he falls; receiving the Eucharist worthily and often, which feeds and strengthens

the life of grace; and maintaining the daily habits of prayer and vigilance that keep a soul in friendship with God. A man who lives this way has, in effect, made his preparation for death a settled feature of his ordinary life, so that he need not scramble at the end, because he is ready at every moment. This is the deepest meaning of the Lord's counsel to watch, because we do not know the hour: not to live in fearful suspense, but to live always in the state of grace, so that the hour, whenever it comes, finds us prepared. The man who lives ready has robbed death of its greatest terror, for he can meet it at any moment with a soul at peace with God.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Church at the Hour of Death

The Last Graces Christ Provides

Christ did not leave his people to face death unaided, but provided, through his Church, particular graces and sacraments specifically for the hour of death, the last and among the most precious of his mercies. A man preparing for a holy death does well to know these provisions, both so that he may receive them himself when his time comes and so that he may ensure the dying he loves are not deprived of them. These are the final helps Christ gives for the final passage, and they are powerful.

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. — John 11:25

The Last Sacraments

The Church provides for the dying a series of sacraments and graces often called the last rites, given to strengthen and prepare a soul for its passage. There is the sacrament of Confession, by which a man is reconciled to God and dies in the state of grace, cleansed of his sins. There is the Anointing of the Sick, which confers grace, strength, and peace to face death in union with Christ, forgives sins, and prepares the soul for its journey. And there is Viaticum, the reception of the Eucharist as food for the passage, Christ himself accompanying the soul as it goes to meet him, which is why the Church gives it this name meaning provision for the journey. Together these form the Church's tender provision for the dying, and they are among the greatest graces available to a man, given precisely for the hardest hour. A man should desire and ask for these when his time comes, and should not, out of fear or false optimism, put them off until he is beyond receiving them.

Do Not Deprive the Dying

One of the real duties that falls to a man preparing for a holy death, his own and others', is to ensure that the dying he loves are not deprived of these last graces through neglect, squeamishness, or a misguided desire to protect them from the knowledge that they are dying. It is a genuine failure of love, however well intended, to keep a priest from a dying person, or to delay calling one until the person is unconscious or dead, out of a reluctance to alarm them or an avoidance of the hard reality. The dying have a right to the Church's final graces, and the greatest kindness is to see that they receive them in time, while they can still consciously participate. This means calling a priest early rather than late when someone is seriously ill or dying, speaking honestly with the dying about their state, and treating the spiritual preparation for death as at least as important as the medical care, which our culture attends to while neglecting the soul. A man who loves the dying will fight for their souls at the end, ensuring they have every grace the Church provides for the passage, and not let a false delicacy rob them of the helps Christ died to give them.

Accompanying the Dying

Beyond the sacraments, a man preparing for a holy death learns the quieter art of simply accompanying the dying, being present to them with love, prayer, and courage in a way our death-avoiding culture has largely forgotten. To sit with the dying, to pray with and for them, to speak honestly and lovingly of what they face, to hold their hand and not flee the hard reality, is among the great works of mercy, and it is one a man should be willing to perform for those he loves and even for strangers. This accompaniment asks a man to overcome his own fear and discomfort around death, to be present where others withdraw, and it is a profound gift to the dying, who often face the end in a loneliness deepened by everyone's avoidance. The man who has faced his own mortality honestly is freed to accompany others in theirs, bringing to the deathbed not the awkward evasion of the frightened but the steady, prayerful presence of one who knows that death, for the Christian, is a passage to be made in hope. To accompany the dying well is both a work of love toward them and a preparation of oneself, a schooling in the reality one will oneself one day face.

CHAPTER FIVE

Facing the Fear of Death

Finding Peace With Our Mortality

However well a man prepares, there remains the fear of death itself, which is natural and which even the saints felt, for Christ himself sweated blood in the garden at its approach.

To prepare for a holy death is not to achieve a state of having no fear, but to find a peace that is deeper than the fear, a hope strong enough to meet it. A man need not be ashamed of fearing death, nor suppose that faith means feeling no dread; he needs rather to know where to find the peace that can carry him through the fear to a good death.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?... thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Corinthians 15:55,57

The Fear Is Natural

The fear of death is woven into human nature, a natural recoil of a being made for life from its apparent undoing, and it is no sin and no failure of faith to feel it. The Lord himself, in Gethsemane, faced his coming death with such anguish that he sweated blood and begged that the cup might pass, and if the sinless Son of God felt the dread of death, no man need be ashamed of feeling it. Faith does not abolish the natural fear of death; it does not promise that a believer will feel no dread at the end. What it offers is something deeper than the absence of fear: a hope that can coexist with fear and finally overcome it, a trust strong enough to carry a man through his dread to a faithful death. A man preparing for a holy death should therefore not aim at feeling no fear, which may never come, but at building the hope and trust that can hold firm even when the fear is real, so that he can say, with the Lord, not my will but yours be done, even as the dread remains.

Where the Peace Comes From

The peace that can meet the fear of death does not come from denying death or minimizing it, but from the Christian hope that death is not the end but a passage, and that the One who waits on the other side is not a terror but a Father. For the Christian, death has been transformed by the death and resurrection of Christ, who passed through it and broke its power, so that it is no longer a plunge into annihilation or the dreaded gateway to condemnation, but the passage through which a man in Christ comes home to God. The peace a man seeks is rooted here, in the firm hope of the resurrection, in the knowledge that Christ has gone ahead and conquered death, and that for those who die in him death opens onto eternal life. This hope does not make the fear vanish, but it gives a man something stronger than the fear to hold onto, a confident expectation that carries him through the dark passage toward the light beyond. The deeper a man's hope in the resurrection and his trust in the mercy of God, the more peace he will have at the end, not a peace that denies the fear but one that overcomes it.

Building the Hope Now

Because the peace that meets death comes from hope and trust, and because these are built over a lifetime and not summoned at the last minute, a man prepares for the fear of death now, by deepening the hope that will carry him through it. The man who has spent his life growing in trust of God, in the habit of surrendering his will, in the firm hope of the resurrection, and in friendship with the God he will meet, approaches death with resources the man of shallow or absent faith does not have; his lifelong hope rises to meet the final fear and overcomes it. This is one more reason the preparation for death is the work of a whole life and not of the deathbed alone: the trust that can face death is grown slowly, through years of prayer and surrender and deepening hope, and a man cannot manufacture at the end a confidence he never built. So a man builds now the hope he will need then, deepening his trust in God, his surrender to God's will, and his hope in the resurrection, so that when the fear of death comes, as it will, he has within him a hope strong enough to meet it, and can pass through the final fear to the peace that lies beyond it.

CHAPTER SIX

Setting Your House in Order

The Practical Work of Readiness

Preparing for a holy death has a practical and even a worldly dimension that a man should not neglect, for there are concrete matters that readiness requires: relationships to mend, affairs to arrange, a spiritual legacy to leave. The man who is ready to die is not only in the state of grace but has, as far as he is able, set his house in order, so that he leaves behind him not a tangle of unfinished business and broken relationships but a life brought to a kind of completion. This practical readiness is itself a work of love, toward God and toward those one will leave behind.

Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live. — Isaiah 38:1

Mend What Is Broken

Among the most important practical preparations for death is the mending of broken relationships, the reconciling with those from whom one is estranged, the forgiving and the asking of forgiveness, so that a man does not carry unresolved enmities to his grave or leave them as a wound among the living. Many a man dies with words unsaid, forgiveness unextended, reconciliation deferred until it is too late, and leaves behind him a legacy of broken relationships that might have been healed. The awareness of death presses a man to do now what he keeps deferring: to forgive the one he has resented, to

seek forgiveness from the one he has wronged, to say the words of love and reconciliation while there is still time to say them. A man preparing for a holy death does not wait, for he does not know how much time he has; he mends what is broken now, reconciles while he can, and so prepares to leave this life at peace with those in it, which is both a mercy to them and a grace to his own soul. To die reconciled is part of dying well, and the time to reconcile is always now.

Arrange Your Affairs

There is also the plain, practical work of arranging one's temporal affairs in a way that cares for those one will leave behind and does not burden them with avoidable confusion and hardship. This is not a spiritual matter in the narrow sense, but it is a real work of love and responsibility: making a will, so that one's wishes are clear and one's dependents provided for; putting one's affairs in order so that those left behind are not saddled with a mess; making one's wishes known regarding one's care and one's funeral, including the desire for the last sacraments; and generally arranging things so that one's death, whenever it comes, falls as lightly as possible on those who must deal with its aftermath. A man who loves his family will not leave them, on top of their grief, a chaos of unarranged affairs to untangle, but will have seen to these practical matters in good time. This too is part of preparing for a holy death, the responsible ordering of one's temporal house so that one's passing is a sorrow to those left behind but not an avoidable burden, and so that one's final act toward them is one of provision and care.

Leave a Spiritual Legacy

Finally, a man preparing for a holy death considers the spiritual legacy he will leave, the faith and the example and the words he will pass on to those who come after him, which may be among the most important things he ever gives. A man leaves behind him not only his possessions but his influence, and the deepest inheritance he can give his children and those he loves is the faith, modeled in his life and commended in his words. The awareness of death prompts a man to attend to this, to make sure he has passed on what matters most, to speak the words of faith and love and counsel that he wants to leave, to commend his dear ones to God, and to ensure that his life has pointed those who follow him toward the eternity he is going to meet. Some men write these things down, a spiritual testament or letters to be read after they are gone; others simply make sure to say them while they live. Either way, the man who prepares well for death thinks about what he will leave in the souls of those who survive him, and labors to make that legacy one of faith and love, so that his death, far from being merely a loss, becomes a final gift and a last word pointing those he leaves toward God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

To Die Well Is to Live Well

The Preparation That Is Simply Holiness

We come at last to the truth that gathers up everything this book has said and reveals the preparation for death to be, in the end, nothing other than the living of a holy life. There is no special, separate program of death-preparation distinct from the ordinary work of Christian living; the man who prepares well to die is simply the man who lives well now, and the whole of his formation has been, all along, a preparation for his death and the eternity beyond it. To see this is to see the preparation for a holy death not as a morbid appendix to life but as its very meaning.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. — Philippians 1:21

The Same Thing From Two Sides

Living a holy life and preparing for a holy death turn out to be the same thing viewed from two directions, for everything that prepares a man to die well is simply what makes a good Christian life, and everything in a good Christian life is also a preparation for death. To live in the state of grace, to receive the sacraments worthily, to pray daily, to grow in virtue, to love God and neighbor, to keep short accounts with God, these are at once the content of a holy life and the whole substance of preparing for a holy death. There is no separate curriculum for dying well; a man prepares for death by living well, and he lives well by keeping death in view. The man who has given himself to the ordinary work of Christian formation has, without perhaps realizing it, been preparing all along for the hour of his death, building the habits, the grace, and the hope that will carry him through it. The preparation for death is not an addition to the Christian life but its inner meaning, the orientation of the whole toward the end for which it exists.

Death as Harvest

Seen in this light, death loses its character as mere loss and takes on its true character as harvest, the gathering in of a life's growth, the moment when all a man has become in Christ is brought to its fulfillment. For the man who has lived well, death is not the destruction of his life's work but its completion, the point at which the long labor of becoming holy passes into the enjoyment of its fruit, and everything he has grown into is harvested into eternity. This is why Saint Paul could say that for him to die was gain, not loss: because death, for the man who has lived in Christ, is the passage into the fullness of what he has been growing toward all his life, the final and permanent possession of the

God he has sought. The whole Christian life is a kind of sowing, and death is the harvest, and the man who has sown well in his living reaps well in his dying. Far from being the enemy that cancels a man's life, death for such a man is the friend that gathers it in and brings it home.

The Mission Completed in Hope

And so the formation that began with a man learning to live as an apostle finds its completion here, at the hour of death, which is not the failure of the mission but its consummation, the moment a man hands back to God a life spent in his service and passes to his reward. The apostle does not labor in this world forever; he labors for a span and then goes home, and his death, far from ending his mission, crowns it, the point at which a life given to God and others is finally offered up in full and received into eternal life. A man who has lived as an apostle, pouring out the grace he received on the world around him, comes to his death not as a defeated man whose work is cut short but as a faithful servant whose labor is complete, ready to hear the word every apostle lives for, the welcome of the Master into the joy of his Lord. This is the end toward which the whole of a man's formation has tended, the holy death that crowns a holy and apostolic life, and the man who has prepared for it by living well can meet it, when it comes, not with terror but with hope, knowing that for him to live was Christ, and to die is gain.

CONCLUSION

Ready Whenever He Comes

The one appointment every man will keep is the hour of his death, and this book has been about preparing for it, not with morbid dread but with the clear-eyed wisdom that faces the one certain fact of the future and gets ready for it. We have seen that honesty about death is the beginning of wisdom, that keeping the end in view clarifies how to live, that the one thing finally needful is to die in the state of grace, that Christ provides last graces for the final passage, that the fear of death is met by a hope built over a lifetime, that readiness includes the practical work of setting one's house in order, and that, in the end, preparing for a holy death is simply living a holy life.

The great liberation in all of this is that a man who has prepared is freed from the terror that haunts the unprepared, able to meet death whenever it comes with a soul at peace. He does not know the day or the hour, and he does not need to, because he is ready at every hour, living in the state of grace, his house in order, his hope in the resurrection firm, his life an ongoing preparation for the passage he will one day make. This readiness

is not a burden that darkens his days but a freedom that lightens them, for the man who has made his peace with death is released to live fully, fearlessly, and well, no longer fleeing the thought that pursues the rest of mankind.

So prepare, beginning now. Face your mortality honestly, let it clarify how you live, keep yourself in the state of grace, build the hope that will carry you through the fear, set your house in order, and give yourself to the holy life that is itself the whole preparation for a holy death. Do this, and you need not fear the one appointment you will surely keep, for it will find you ready, and will prove to be not the end you dreaded but the harvest of all you have become, the passage home to the God you have served, and the gain that Saint Paul promised to all who can say that for them, to live is Christ. Live ready, and death, when he comes, will find a man prepared, and will open not onto darkness but onto the unending life for which you were made.

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