

REFLECTIONS ON DEATH

Fr Joby Kachappilly VC

Director Divine Retreat Ashram, Faridabad

jobichanvc@gmail.com

When I lost my father on June 15th, 2004 I realized the intensity of the blow death can deliver on human minds. I can still feel the warmth of the tears I shed and the farewell kiss I gave on the cheeks and forehead of my beloved father, after the final prayers during the funeral rite. The memory of that day is still an open wound in my mind. The thought that his loving presence will not be there any more for me and for my family members as a source of solace, makes my eyes moist even now. But my inner eyes of faith led me beyond the pain of separation to the thought that now there is someone as my own in heaven.

We can see Jesus expressing grief at the tomb of Lazarus. There is no room for reason and thought when a person is grief-stricken. That is why Jesus' expression of grief reached the verge of tears. Even Jesus who reminded his disciples about his own death repeatedly can be seen becoming weak at times, in spite of garnering strength for his own death through prayers. He said, "I am deeply grieved even to death" (Mat. 26:38). In His agony He cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). This is a lamentation that cannot be forgotten by history. Those who are in great pain and on the verge of death may experience this agony. We must contemplate on the point that Christ gained strength from the thought of resurrection after death. It is here that death becomes a feast and a celebration. We observe the death of Christ as a feast. The awareness that after death we are getting ready for a feast in heaven will help us grow and gain strength spiritually. If we glance through history, we see people who fell in love with death; people who feared death; people who embraced death joyfully; people who had been waiting for death and so on. But only those who discover the real meaning of death realize that it is a new life. This realization alone will give us hope and help us gain strength while facing death. The words uttered by the first martyr of the Holy Church, St. Stephen, while being stoned to death should serve as a source of hope and anointment in our spiritual life.

This life is not meant to end in the grave. A tomb is an altar to beautify the body that preserved and protected the soul. There is a time during which our Father in heaven will receive our soul. That is the life after death or life in heaven. When the corpse merges with the soil, the soul joins its creator. That is eternal life. At the

same time, life in hell is leaving your soul in the hands of the devil after consciously indulging in the denial of God. Aren't people who commit suicide giving away their lives to Satan? However there is a possibility of their soul being saved according to their mental disposition at the time of death. God cannot receive sinful souls they have to be sanctified. That is why we offer sacrifices and prayers for the departed souls. In the Old Testament we see Judas interceding for the soldiers who lost their lives in the war, offering sacrifices for sins. "In doing this he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. If he were not expecting those who had fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead" (2 Mac 12:43,44). Memories about the departed souls sometimes create in some people a sense of guilt. They feel that they failed to do good to them while they were alive. The only remedy for this is to offer intense prayers for them during the rest of your life. Those who are alive are the middlemen who can intercede. Christian love is not meant to end in the grave, but is covenantal love that has to last even after death. The Mass and sacrifices offered for the salvation of the departed souls are considered very valuable in God's presence.

Death is the beginning of a spiritual relationship. Remember that those have departed from us are with us as a loving presence to strengthen us (Wisdom 38:1,2). Then their departure will not remain as a painful experience. Bear in mind the words uttered by Jesus after the death of Lazarus. This life is not to end in death. Let us also go to our tombs with hope as Jesus did. Let our prayers be a source of solace and comfort to those who in pain of death and at the same time let our prayers bring resurrection to those have already left this world.