
BOOK TWO

The Art of Dying Well As Death Draws Near



CHAPTER ONE

The first rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near, which is to meditate on death.

In the beginning we divided the art of dying well into two parts. In the first part we set down the rules of dying well which pertained to the time of our lives when death could still seem far off. In the second part, which we are now taking up, we will set down the rules which pertain to death as already present or soon to come. Death is said to be imminent or at the door when we are worn out by old age, as the Apostle says, "That which is obsolete and has grown old is near its end" (Heb 8:13), or when a grave and, in the judgment of physicians, very dangerous disease attacks an old man, an adult, a youth, or a child. The first rule of this second group is, in our opinion, meditation on death. For when we are in the prime of life, death hardly moves us at all, however diligently and attentively we consider it, since it seems far off and thus less frightening. But when it seems to be almost here, so that it is almost tangible, then a consideration of it truly affects and greatly profits us. All the arts are better learned by practice than by instruction, and those who died, if not often, at least twice, clearly died happily. Such were

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Blessed Christina and Drithelmus the Englishman, whom I mentioned in my book *The Mourning of the Dove*, and that hermit whose life John Climacus recounts and of whom we shall say a few words at the end of this chapter.¹ We who are allowed to die but once have no better path open to us than to meditate and consider what occurs at death.

First, we should consider that in death the soul is separated from the body, but that the soul is not snuffed out and the body does not die and return to dust without any hope of resurrection. If that were to occur, as atheists believe, they would apparently be right who said, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die" (Is 22:13). This is a very old proverb as one can see from Isaiah, chapter 22, and from the Apostle in the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15 (1 Cor 15:32). There are some among us who say they believe, but deny it by their deeds, as one can see from the fact that, even in extreme old age, they do not think of death, just as if they were never going to die or as if they thought that with the death of the body the soul utterly perished as well. Despite their ravings, the separation of the flesh from the soul, as of a wife from her husband, is a temporary divorce, not a permanent repudiation. For the soul is immortal, and the flesh will without doubt rise on the last day.

If we are wise Christians, we ought to think often of our own approaching death. The whole of our existence depends upon our dying well. In this life the passage from virtue to vice is not difficult, nor with the grace of God is the passage from vice to virtue. He who is today an heir of the kingdom of heaven can fall by sin tomorrow from the heritage of the sons of God and become deserving of eternal fire. So too, under the inspiration of God's grace, one who is a slave of the devil can be freed from that servitude and again be numbered among the sons of God and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. But one who dies an enemy of God and deserves eternal fire will be an enemy of God forever and handed over to eternal fire. On the other hand, one who dies a friend of God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven will never be able to fall from that height of grace and glory. Thus all our happiness or unhappiness depends on a good or bad death. And so who but someone clearly stupid and without the least judgment will dare to pass from this life by death without first having used all his diligence to learn to die well and to prepare himself to meet death?

A second consideration about death can be highly useful.

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Death is most certain, as the Prophet says, "Who is the man that shall live, and not see death?" (Ps 89:49), and as the Apostle agrees, "It is appointed unto men to die once and after this comes the judgment" (Heb 9:27); nonetheless, nothing is more uncertain than the day or the hour. Scripture itself proclaims this, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). For many are snatched off in infancy; others arrive at a decrepit old age. Some die as youths, others as adults. But what is worse, many die so suddenly that they do not have time to call upon God and commend their spirit to the divine mercy. Divine providence brings this about in accord with the richness of his wisdom precisely so that none of the elect should dare to cling even for a moment to the filth of mortal sin. Hence, my reader, should your conscience accuse you of mortal sin, do not dare to wait until tomorrow or even delay until the end of the day or even of an hour without at least expressing hatred for your sin before God with a humble and contrite heart.

A third consideration will be no less useful. In the morning, before you go out for the day's work, and in the evening before you settle down for a night's rest, lest death come and find you unprepared, you should carefully examine your conscience to see whether you did anything during the night or during the day just past that might seem to be a sin, especially a mortal sin. And if you find nothing, thank God the author of all goods. But if you find some offense against God, repent seriously and from the heart, confess it to a priest as soon as you can, and gladly accept and faithfully perform the penance he imposes. This method of examining one's conscience at least twice in the day is a marvelous help against death ever finding us unprepared.

A fourth consideration, no less useful than the others, is that which Ecclesiasticus mentions: "In all your works remember your last end, and you shall never sin" (Sir 7:40). For how could anyone sin in his work if he weighs whatever he does upon the scales of God's judgment that will occur at death? Here there belongs that saying of the man who died twice, whom John Climacus mentions in his *Ladder*, step six. Thus he speaks: "I will not omit telling the story of that hermit who dwelled in Horeb. After having lived for a long time most negligently and taking no care for his soul, he eventually came down with a disease and was brought to the point of death. Although he had completely departed from the body, he returned to himself after an hour and begged all of us to depart

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forthwith. The entrance of the cell was blocked with rocks, and he remained inside for twelve years, saying not a word to anyone and not tasting anything but bread and water. He sat there and pondered in awe what he had seen in his ecstasy. And he was so absorbed in thought that he never changed the expression of his face, but constantly stricken with awe, he poured forth in silence a flood of fervent tears. When he was close to death, we entered after breaking open the door. And when we humbly asked of him a word of instruction, we heard from him only this: 'No one who truly bears with him the memory of death will ever be able to sin.'"² That is what he says. Let the reader realize that this is history, not a fable, and written by a man who was holy and who wrote what he saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears.

From this we can easily see how important it is to meditate on death and never drive its presence from our memory. This man was previously negligent in seeking his own salvation, but by the great mercy of God he tasted death and, rising from the dead, he constantly meditated on death for twelve years, while he bewailed his sins with continuous tears. And those sins which he thought slight and venial before his first death, once he had tasted the bitterness of death, he judged to be very serious and deserving twelve years of tearful expiation. He is a true commentator on the words of Scripture, "In all your works remember your last end, and you shall never sin" (Sir 7:40). If the constant memory of one of the last things brought such great profit to that monk, that by twelve years of penance he avoided the endless punishment of hell and earned the glory of the kingdom without end, what should the constant memory of the four last things, namely, death, judgment, hell, and paradise, do for us? Would that many would realize and desire to experience the whole of this profit!

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On the second rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near, which is on the last judgment.

The second of the last things is judgment, which is twofold: the particular judgment at which individual souls are judged as soon as they leave the body, and the general judgment which will take place on the last day. Both are frightening and terrifying for the wicked, but pleasant and glorious for the just. It is highly useful for those who want to die happily to think attentively and frequently of each of them. No one is permitted to deny that the particular judgment will take place immediately after the death of each of us, since the Council of Florence declared against the heretics that those who depart this life stained with mortal sin descend at once to hell-fire, that those who die without mortal sin, but with the debt of temporal punishment, are taken to purgatory, and that those who after the reception of Baptism are found free from sin and the debt of punishment rise immediately to eternal happiness.¹

One may believe, however, as the theologians teach, that the sentence of Christ the Judge is either indicated by the angels or revealed by God to the minds of the souls and that good souls either rise to heaven or descend to purgatory in the company of angels, while the souls of the reprobate are snatched by demons and plunged into hell.² This judgment can occur in a moment, since the Judge is present who, since he is both God and man, knows everything according to the form of man. Saint Peter spoke the truth to Christ, "Lord, you know all things" (Jn 21:17). There is present the accuser, the devil, who is called in Revelation "the accuser of our brethren" (Rv 12:10), and rushes to the dying like a wolf or lion or dog to its prey. There is present the witness, the soul's conscience, which, once freed from the body, can no longer be deceived by ignorance or forgetfulness, but knows itself thoroughly and sees whether it is pleasing to God or hateful to God. Thus nothing prevents the judgment from taking place immediately and being immediately executed. Yet this judgment can be called private if it is compared with the public and general one which will take place on the last day in the presence of all angels and men.

We must mention the reasons for the necessity of a second

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judgment for those who were already not only judged, but also rewarded or punished. The first reason relates to God. For some see many just men unjustly treated by the wicked and also many wicked men abounding in temporal goods, and they suspect that God either does not see these things or does not care. And so, in order that the whole human race may understand that the world is justly governed by God, God has decided to render rewards to the good and punishments to the wicked on the last day in the presence of all the angels and men. Thus all will be forced to say and proclaim, "You are just, O Lord, and just are your judgments" (Rv 16:5, 7).

The second reason is that Jesus Christ, who was judged unjustly and subjected to severe and shameful punishment before men, might be seen before the whole world as judging all the wicked from his lofty throne in order to fulfill what was written in the Book of Job, "Your cause has been judged as that of the wicked. Cause and judgment you shall recover" (Jb 36:17). Thus the ignominy of the passion of the Son of God will be justly compensated for by the glory of his judging on the stage of the whole world, and then the words of the Apostle will be fulfilled, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" (Phil 2:10).

The third reason is that the retribution of the just might be complete. For the reward of justice is honor and glory. And since many highly just men were publicly put to death as criminal and wicked, it is fitting that their justice be proclaimed on the stage of the whole world. The martyrs of the Lord especially belong to this multitude of saints, for they will stand crowned before the eyes of their pagan persecutors and heretical princes and kings.

The fourth reason is for the confusion of the hypocrites. For there are some who die with the aura of sanctity, although they are really wicked. Such are the heretical Calvinists and Anabaptists, and such were those of whom Saint Cyprian writes in the book *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, "Even if they are handed over to the flames and fires and are burned, or even if they are tossed to the beasts and lay down their lives, there will be no crown of faith, but the punishment of perfidy. Nor will there be a glorious death in religious virtue, but a perishing in desperation."³ Thus at least in the general judgment hypocrisy must be publicly uncovered.

The fifth reason is that bodies and souls may be judged together. In the particular judgment, only the soul is judged and

receives its reward or punishment, but in the general judgment the whole of man will appear. And since souls sinned or did good with their bodies, it is fitting that after the resurrection souls along with their bodies receive rewards or punishments. The sixth and final reason is that, beyond having the good and bad deeds which we did in this life rewarded and punished, the good or evil effects of our right and wrong actions that continue on to the end of the world may publicly obtain praise or blame.

Let us illustrate this point by examples. Pious men have built hospices in which many recover their health, monasteries in which many are instructed in piety, and schools in which many are educated in the disciplines, and these works last for a long time. Others write books useful for spreading wisdom or for the various arts or for piety or for other good works, by which many profit and help their neighbor in every age. But there are bad men who destroy many others by writing dirty or seditious or heretical books. By building theaters for the games of gladiators or for obscene comedies or in other ways, many others harm their neighbor for a long time after they have died. At the end of the world, when all the series of events will come to an end and the merits, whether good or bad, of all men will be brought to completion, it will then be fitting that the sentence of the supreme, most powerful, and most just Judge be pronounced for all on that day which will be the most memorable of all that have passed since the beginning of the world.

These then are the reasons why, besides the particular judgment which will take place at the death of individuals, we should look for a general judgment at the end of the world. We have still to mention who will be the Judge in this terrible judgment, from where he will arrive, to what place he will come, whom he will judge, and what will be the Judge's sentence. The Judge without doubt will be our Lord Jesus Christ. For he says in Saint Matthew, "When the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory; and before him will be gathered all the nations," and so on (Mt 25:31-32). The same thing is confirmed by the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says, "He it is who has been appointed by God to be judge of the living and of the dead" (Acts 10:42). The Apostle Paul also says in Acts, "God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world with justice by a Man whom he has appointed . . . by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). In his

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Gospel the Apostle John speaks as follows, "He has granted him power to render judgment, because he is the Son of Man" (Jn 5:27), and in the same chapter, "Neither does the Father judge any man, but all judgment he has given to the Son" (Jn 5:22).

He will come from heaven for judgment, and he will come near to the earth as far as the air so that he can be seen and heard by all men who will be on earth. Hear Christ himself in Matthew, "You shall see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven" (Mt 26:64). Hear the Apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonians. He says, "They will be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Christ in the air" (1 Thes 4:17), and the Prophet Joel had predicted the same thing, "I will gather together all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Josaphat; and I will plead with them there" (Jl 3:2). The words "into the valley of Josaphat" are correctly interpreted to mean that the great judgment of all men will take place there, both because the Hebrew word *Josaphat* properly signifies the judgment of God, and because the valley of Josaphat is near Jerusalem on the east side of the temple, as Saint Jerome states in his commentary on the third chapter of Joel.⁴ No place could be more suitable than that for such a great judgment. For from there one can see Jerusalem where Christ preached, and from there one can see also Mount Calvary where Christ was crucified for the redemption of the human race as well as Mount Olivet, where the victor over death ascended into heaven. To Josaphat Christ will come upon the clouds of heaven with all his angels, numbering at least "thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand," as Daniel writes (Dn 7:10). I said "at least" because the opinion of Denis the Areopagite and of Saint Thomas is that the number of the holy angels surpasses that of all bodily things.⁵ In the company of Christ will be the whole multitude of holy men and women in glorious bodies, of whom it is said in Revelation, "I saw a great multitude which no man could number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rv 7:9).

In this judgment there will be a spectacle such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world and will never be seen again. All the wicked will be subject to the sentence of eternal death. In their bodies that they have taken up again, they will stand on the earth, naked and downcast with the deepest and most incredible sadness, having been summoned by the angels from all corners of the earth to the valley of Josaphat and its vicinity. Their number

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will be far greater than the number of the saints, since the Lord himself said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 20:16, 22:14) and, "Close is the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it; broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter that way" (Mt 7:14, 13). If it is true, as it most surely is, that the number of holy men and women cannot be counted, then how much more uncountable will be the mob of reprobates? Added to them will be the evil spirits, who are also most numerous.

After all these arrangements, before the sentence of the Judge is pronounced, the books of records will be opened, as can be seen from Daniel the Prophet and Saint John (Dn 7:10; Rv 5:9, 20:12). The Apostle Paul explains the nature of these books which will be opened in the judgment when he says to the Corinthians, "Pass no judgment before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in darkness and make manifest the counsels of hearts" (1 Cor 4:5). For God will pour forth such light that it will make manifest the consciences of all the wicked. Thus all on that stage will see the consciences of all others as well as their deeds, words, thoughts, and desires. Oh, what a spectacle it will be to see the consciences of hypocrites, of liars, of traitors, of scoffers, who made nothing of swearing falsely by all that was sacred! Because of this publication of the crimes and outrages of all men, and the resulting anticipation of the sentence to come, there will occur what is described in Revelation, "The kings of the earth, and the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong, and everyone, bond and free," will hide "themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. And they [will say] to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of him who sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' " (Rv 6:15-17). The Lord predicted the same thing in the Gospel, when he said to the pious women, as he carried the cross on his shoulders, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, days are coming in which men will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' " (Lk 23:28-30). And at the end, the sentence of the Judge will be pronounced, as he says, "Come, blessed . . . depart from me, accursed ones" (Mt

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25:34, 41), and the just will enter eternal life, and the unjust eternal fire.

I beg my readers to consider and reconsider frequently and attentively that they too will be on that stage. Now when there is time, let them seriously weigh what they should do. And they should not protest that the day of judgment is still far off and there is no need to be tormented beforehand as if the day of the Lord were already here. For even if the general judgment is far off, the particular judgment is not. It is at hand and clearly stands at the door. And the sentence of the general judgment will be just the same as the sentence of the particular judgment. Thus a wise person ought in every way to prepare himself to hear the sentence of the particular judgment, as if it were to be heard today or tomorrow. For the hour of judgment is no more distant than the hour of death, and the hour of death cannot be far for an old man or one suffering from a serious illness. And so, in awaiting such a judgment, in which will be decided a matter of supreme importance, one ought seriously to implore the Advocate, who also will be the future Judge. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just," as John the Apostle teaches us (1 Jn 2:1). Thus we ought also to beseech the friends of the Advocate, especially the most merciful Virgin, the Mother of the Advocate, and the angels and saints. It is fitting that we approach the Advocate and the friends of the Advocate not merely with words, but also with gifts. For the saints do not refuse gifts which profit not them, but the poor of Jesus Christ. For the blessed in heaven have no need of our gifts.

CHAPTER THREE

The third rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near, which is on hell.

After the consideration of death and judgment it is good to ponder very carefully the tortures of hell as well as the joys of heaven. For these are the two of the last things, one of which will befall each of us as Christ pronounces judgment. These two are opposed as contraries such that one must render us wretched, the other happy. But

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since we have written on each of them near the end of our book *The Ascent of the Mind to God*, and we wrote again on the joys of paradise in the whole book *The Eternal Happiness of the Saints*, and on the tortures of hell in the second book of *The Mourning of the Dove*, and we have spoken to the people on all the last things in extemporaneous Latin homilies which we have set down in writing, it seems good merely to mention the main topics so that the reader can carefully and profitably think and meditate upon them, while he awaits death and prepares himself to accept it with joy.¹

Thus we have undertaken the brief consideration of three points concerning the unhappy state of those condemned to hell: the place, the time, and the manner. The place is the depth, the time is eternity, the manner is punishment without limit. The place, I say, is the depth, since on account of the immense crimes by which they offended the divine majesty, the reprobate will be imprisoned in the deepest part of the earth, which is furthest distant from the royal palace which is in the heavens. This is fitting to punish appropriately the pride of the devil and of proud men. For the devil said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, . . . I will be like the Most High," and he was told, "You shall be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit" (Is 14:13-15). The same thing will happen to all men who are children of pride.

From this first woe of the reprobate there follow three others: darkness, tight confinement, and need. Since hell is in the center of the earth where the rays of the sun and the moon and the stars cannot penetrate, there can be no light in it, except that of the sulfurous flames which serve not to lessen, but to increase the punishment. For that light will give them sight of the demons, their most cruel enemies, and of those men, whether friends or relatives, who were the cause of their damnation. They will see their own nakedness, their deceitfulness, their chains, their torments, all of which they might well wish not to see. Certainly they will not see anything good from which they might derive consolation. Oh, darkness not dark! Darkness because it hides everything good, and yet not dark because it makes visible everything evil.

The confines of hell are so narrow that they can scarcely hold the bodies of the many damned. For the earth is almost an indivisible point in comparison with the immensity of the heavens, and hell encompasses not the whole of it, nor a half, but only the center. Moreover, the number of those damned exceeds the number of

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those saved, of whom we read in Revelation, "I saw a great multitude which no man could number" (Rv 7:9). And so who can grasp the tightness of the confines of hell? Let the great kings, Nabuchodonosor, Darius, Alexander, Julius Caesar, and others, whom the globe could hardly contain, go there and broaden the boundaries of hell, if they can, so that they may lie a little more comfortably and be tortured a little less. Oh, vanity of vanities! Mortals strive to extend and broaden all their fields, their rules, their kingdoms, so that for a little while they might boast of their many subjects, and there never occurs to them the narrowness of the confines of hell that awaits them where they will be forced to dwell, not for a little while, but forever, whether they like it or not.

And what shall I say of the incredible neediness of the damned? Needy with respect to everything good, they who inhabit hell will be rich only in their abundant punishment. In hell rich men will remember the abundant delights of their life on earth, whether in food or drink or in expensive clothes, or in hunting or fowling, in gardens and vineyards, in theaters and various games. But this memory will only increase their pain as they see themselves in hell lying naked, despised, wretchedly stripped of their goods and fortunes. Then they will say what we read in the Book of Wisdom, "What has pride profited? Or what advantage has the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow" (Wis 5:8-9).

Let us get to the second point, namely, time. How long will the exile of hell last? Would that it would last no longer than our stay in this life has lasted! But there will be no comparison. For after time there will be no more time, but eternity. Thus the stay of the wicked in the torments of hell will last as long as the eternity of God, which, as it lacks a beginning, will also lack an end. The damned will be tortured as long as the blessed are in joy. Finally, the reprobate will be dead as long as God himself lives, and unless God were to cease to be what he is, the reprobate will not cease to be in the pains in which they are. O death-dealing life! O deathless death! If you are life, how do you kill? If you are death, how do you last? You ought to be called neither death nor life, since each of them has something good. Life has quiet, and death an end. But you are neither quiet nor do you have an end. What shall we say that you are but that totality of evil that neither life nor death has? It would be greatly to our advantage if we could even moderately fathom

what eternal punishment is. This realization alone, as a sort of bridle, would check the passions of all and would so temper our life that we would all seem to be not merely Christians, but even the holiest of hermits.

Of the three points for consideration there remains only the manner, namely, that the punishment is without limit. For the punishment of hell is not a single punishment, but the sum total of all punishments. In hell every power of the intelligent soul is tortured along with all the senses, whether internal or external, and not one after the other. Rather all these pains launch their attack upon a man at once. As here on earth we never experience the total good of the blessed, so we never experience the utter evil of the damned. For when one has pains in his eyes, he does not at the same time suffer pain in his teeth, and one who is pained in his teeth is not also suffering in his eyes, and so on with the rest. But in hell terrible pains will have to be endured simultaneously in all our members, since the fire of hell will envelop our whole body and torture the whole of it with great violence and yet never consume it.

“Depart from me, accursed ones,” says the Judge, “into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41), and Isaiah says, “Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched” (Is 66:24)—words which our Lord repeated three times in one chapter of the Gospel according to Mark (9:44–46, Vulgate) in order to impress clearly on our hearts that the punishment of hell is fire that will last eternally and that the whole body will be most cruelly racked with bitter pain through all eternity. Those who have seen a man here on earth burned with fire after a just judgment could hardly bear the sight of such a punishment, even though it is quickly finished. But if a man, however guilty, should last a whole day in the fire, surely no one could bear such a horrible sight. Let each say to himself: If I cannot endure the burning of a living man who is nothing to me, how will I bear the burning of my own body for one hour, or day, or month, or year? And if this strikes me as too ghastly even to think about, with what folly do I expose myself to such a great danger as burning for eternity? If we do not believe this, where is our faith? If we believe it, where is our good judgment? Our prudence? If we are of sound mind and have faith in the Holy Scriptures, how can it be that we are not stirred by the threat of such massive danger? Let one who desires to be saved enter into his heart. After he has considered all

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these matters with great attention, let him behave so that death finds him ready and the fire of hell may not get him, but so that he may deserve to enter happily into the joy of the Lord.

CHAPTER FOUR

The fourth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is the glory of the blessed.

There remains the glory of the blessed, which occupies the final place among the four last things. On this topic I shall consider only the three points that I considered in the previous chapter on the punishments of hell: the place, the time, and the manner. The place of the glory of the blessed is the heavenly paradise; the time is eternity; the manner is happiness exceeding all limit.

Let us begin with the first. The place of the heavenly paradise is high above all the mountains of the earth, above all the elements, above all the stars. Thus in the Holy Scriptures the kingdom of heaven is called "the house of God, the city of the great king, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Gn 28:17; Mt 5:35; Heb 12:22). The sublime location of the heavenly city shows us that this place has many privileges and prerogatives over all the other places in this whole world. First, the higher a place is in this universe, the larger and more spacious it is, since the shape of the universe of created things is seen to be round, with the earth occupying the center of the world and the highest heaven containing in its embrace the last or highest sphere of almost infinite width.

Thus just as the place of the blessed is the highest, so it is the most spacious. So too, on the contrary, as the place of the damned is the lowest, it is also the smallest of all. Further, the highest place is also the purest. For certainly water is purer than earth, and air than water, and fire than air, and heaven is purer than fire, and the fiery heaven than the starry heaven. Finally, the highest place is also the safest; no evil can approach that place and no scourge draw near to his dwelling (Ps 91:10). Thus the seat of the blessed is most spacious; the blessed can freely move about from one place to another.

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And there is no danger of their becoming tired since by the gift of agility they can move from place to place in a moment. What a pleasure it will be to move from the east to the west, from the south to the north, to circle the whole globe in a moment, while those who have perished remain in one place in hell for all eternity, bound hand and foot! An even greater pleasure lies in store for the blessed when they enjoy the pure air of heaven, which neither darkness nor fogs nor mists nor blasts of wind nor any pestilence can mar. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of hell, wretched beyond all measure, are forced to lie in that place full of horror in the black fog and smoke of the seething furnace with no hope of a purer air. What shall I say of the city on high, most safe from all betrayal or any evil because of its lofty height? "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem," says David, "praise your God, O Sion. Because he has strengthened the bolts of your gates" (Ps 147:1-2). This reference to fortifying the gates does not mean what it sounds like; for in Revelation it is said of that city: "And its gates shall not be shut by day; for there shall be no night there" (Rv 21:25). Therefore, God "strengthened the bolts of the gates" of the heavenly Jerusalem, by making it unable to be stormed because of its height. And if the dragon fought with Michael in heaven, he did not rise up from the underworld to heaven, but he was created in heaven and rebelled against his Creator before he was confirmed in grace. Puffed up with pride, he tried to be equal to the Most High. But because the heavenly Jerusalem was founded in peace, the enemy of peace could not remain there, but immediately fell "as lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18), and he could thereafter not set foot in the place. And from that time no one is admitted to dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem unless he is founded and solidly confirmed in perpetual peace.

Having covered the topic of place, we will now say a few things on time. The time of dwelling in the heavenly Jerusalem since the fall of the devil is time without time, that is, perpetual duration without the passage of days and nights, for in Revelation the Angel "swore by him who lives forever and ever, . . . that time shall be no longer" (Rv 10:6), and according to the Gospel, when the last day is over, the Lord will say, "And these," namely, the wicked, "will go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life" (Mt 25:46). The only difference will be that the wicked will suffer eternity against their will and seek death and not find it, whereas the just will find nothing more pleasant than that

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blessed eternity, that is, life without fear of dying and standing without fear of falling.

There remains for us to explain briefly the manner in which the blessed will dwell in paradise after the resurrection. And I think one thing can be said with certitude, that all the good things which are desired on earth, mixed as they are with many evils, will be possessed by the blessed in heaven to a greater degree and without any admixture of evil. The things counted as goods upon earth are honor, power, riches, and pleasures. We might find the honor of the blessed in heaven utterly unbelievable, if he who cannot lie had not asserted it. Listen to Christ the Lord, who is Truth, speaking in the Revelation of blessed John, "He who overcomes, I will permit him to sit with me upon my throne; as also I have overcome and have sat with my Father on his throne" (Rv 3:21). What more, I ask you, could be added to this glory? The throne of the Son of God is surely placed highest in heaven, and he who sits on it can be considered to have attained, indeed, an honor beyond belief. What hosannas, what praises will resound before God and the angels in heaven when a man, once mortal and fragile, will be placed by the hands of God upon the throne of the Son of God, who is "Prince of the kings of the earth" (Rv 1:5) and "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rv 19:16)? Surely nothing can be added to such an honor.

The power of the blessed person will be great almost beyond what we can imagine. The promise of Christ is found in the Gospel passage concerning the faithful servant, "Amen I say to you, he will set him over all his goods" (Mt 24:47). These words clearly mean that in heaven the faithful servant will share the power God has over all creation. And how great is the power of God over creatures? Utterly the greatest and beyond comparison. Thus the saints will be called and will really be kings of the whole world, not for a few years, but for all eternity. And this is the sentence which Christ, the supreme judge, will pronounce for the just, "Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34).

Concerning the riches of the blessed it should satisfy everyone to know that there will be abundant riches lasting forever, as the Prophet says, "Glory and wealth shall be in his house" (Ps 112:3) and, "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28), as the Apostle says in the Letter to the Corinthians. Theophylactus as well as Saint Augustine explain these words so that the sense is: "God will be all in all,"

because now one thing is for us food, another drink, another clothing, still another a house, and yet others wealth, pleasure, honor, and power. But in heaven after the resurrection God will be for all the blessed food, drink, clothing, house, wealth, pleasure, honor, and power.¹ Thus for the blessed in heaven everything will be precious, everything incorruptible, everything divine. Saint Jerome adds in the Letter to Amandus that God will be for all the blessed not only all corporeal, but also all spiritual things, for now all divine graces are not given to everyone.² Rather to one is given wisdom, as to Solomon, to another goodness, as to David, to still another patience, as to Job. But when the end of all things has come, then all will be in all so that each saint will possess all the virtues and gifts. What, I ask, would a miser in this world not give in order to possess all riches? What would the lover of pleasure not give in order to attain all the pleasures he desires? What would an ambitious man not give to receive all the honors and dignities that he seeks? And yet these are temporal goods that will soon perish, and what is worse, after a short time they will be exchanged for everlasting poverty, pain, and shame. Why then do we not seek God, in whom we will possess all spiritual and corporeal goods for all of eternity?

Finally, what shall we say of the joy and pleasure of the blessed? Isaiah and Paul exclaim and say, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him" (Is 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9). For the just who love him, God has truly prepared in the heavenly fatherland joy, happiness, pleasure, delight, sweetness, and contentment, such as no mortal has ever tasted or has been able to attain in thought. To produce delight three things are needed: the power, the object, and the union of the power with the object. And the greater these are, the greater is the delight produced. No power in created things is greater, more lively, and more capable of delight than the rational will. No object is more outstanding, more lovable, and more sweet than the essence of the Creator. David says, "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps 34:9). The Wise Man says, speaking of the sun and the stars, "With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be goods, let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they: for the first author of beauty made all those things" (Wis 13:3). No more intimate union can be conceived than that of God with the rational will, as the Apostle says, "He who cleaves to the Lord is one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17). The

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joining of bodies generally takes place on the surface, without penetrating to the interior, and yet bodily pleasure so greatly affects men that they are reduced in a sense to insanity. What contentment, then, what sweetness will the soul taste when it is joined so intimately with God who is infinite sweetness that it becomes one spirit with him? Words fail me here to express what I ponder with myself in thought.

And note that all human pleasure which arises from created things lasts either for but a moment or at most very briefly. But the pleasure which arises from the union of the human spirit with God who is infinite sweetness will never be limited at all. Yet such madness rules many men that they prefer sordid, small carnal pleasures that last at most for a brief time to the very great and pure pleasures that will last without doubt for all of eternity. And that should suffice here for the four last things.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fifth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near, which is making a will.

After a consideration of death drawing near and the other last things, it follows that those who are preparing to depart from this world should put their house in order. Thus Isaiah warned Hezekiah, saying, "Put your house in order, for you shall die and not live" (Is 38:1). Religious are free from that bother, since they can say with the apostles, "Behold, we have left all and followed you" (Mt 19:27). One of these was Saint Augustine, of whom Possidius writes in his *Life*, "He did not make a will, because as one of Christ's poor he did not have the wherewithal to make one. For though he was a bishop, yet like a religious he kept nothing of his own."¹

A will should be made at the beginning of an illness, unless one has wisely already done so. Those who do not think of making a will unless they are forced by relatives or friends when disease weakens them are making a foolish mistake. For at that time either their minds begin to wander, or at least they do not arrange their affairs with the wisdom they would have possessed in good health.

They must first of all consider repaying their debts, if they are burdened by any. Then they should leave their wealth to the people to whom they see that it rightly belongs. They should not allow themselves to be drawn to persons they love more, if this should be somehow contrary to justice. In matters which depend upon their choice, let them first consider the glory of God, then the needs of their neighbor. If they should have superfluous riches which, as such, ought to have been distributed to the poor long ago, let them not suppose that their conscience is clear because they confessed this to a priest along with their other sins and obtained absolution, unless they have given the order that those possessions be given to the poor or they themselves immediately do this. For it is the common opinion of the Fathers and of the principal scholastic Doctors that superfluous goods are owed to the poor. We have written on this point in the previous book, chapter nine, and need not repeat it here. Concerning the goods which can be given away by their free choice, let them consult pious men as to the works of charity more pleasing to God in terms of time and place. For in one place the building of a church or a cemetery will be more urgent; elsewhere the placement of poor virgins in matrimony; still elsewhere the urgent need is the number of sick in the hospital or of poor beggars in the streets; and in another place it is the redemption of captives. Finally, in this sort of distribution there is no better rule than "sincere faith and clear foresight," as Saint Ambrose writes, or "charity with prudence and prudence joined with charity," as Saint Gregory puts it.²

It is important that the alms, which the living give or which the dying order to be given, are given or are ordered to be given when the one giving or ordering them given is pleasing to God. Then almsgiving wins great merit for the donor, and such good almsgivers are welcomed "into the everlasting dwellings" by good friends, according to the promise of Christ in Luke (Lk 16:9). If alms are given or ordered to be given by a wicked man, they are without avail unto eternal life regardless of other merits. For they do not bring it about that the donors are received into the eternal dwellings. Hence, advice should be sought from a prudent confessor or friends by a man who realizes that he made a will while he lay in the filth of mortal sin, so that after making a new complete and truthful confession he might approve and ratify the whole disposition he made in his will,

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especially concerning the giving of alms after his death either to the church or to the poor.

Finally, we should add that one who has bestowed many gifts on his neighbors in his will should not forget his own soul, especially since it is possible that he may be carried off to purgatory rather than going directly to heaven. Thus he would be prudent and pious in ordering a portion of the alms to be given to priests for offering sacrifices to the Lord for his soul. "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins," as is said in the Book of Maccabees (2 Mc 12:46). From that passage Saint Augustine argues that the souls of the dead are helped even more by the sacrifice of the Body of Christ, if they were helped by the sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament.³

CHAPTER SIX

The sixth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is concerning the confession of sins.

After having considered the four last things and put one's house in order, it is necessary that an old man or one suffering a serious illness should put aside all other concerns and seriously attend to the proper reception of the sacrament of penance. For it often happens that at a time when the sacrament of penance is needed more, it is not received as properly. For because they are prevented by pain and weakness or by failing judgment or by fright at the nearness of death or by the love of dear ones whom they leave against their will, those who suffer from a serious illness make a rather imperfect confession of their sins and find it very difficult amid such difficulties to stir up in themselves true and perfect contrition.

I can bear witness to this difficulty which the sick especially suffer. For I once visited a friend, a rich nobleman, who fell into a deadly illness after committing a grave sin, and I said to him that nothing could be more salutary for him at the moment than true penance and contrition for his sins, since God never despises a humble and contrite heart. He answered, "What is contrition? I do

not understand what you are asking of me.” I replied, “I ask that you be sorry in the sincerity of your heart for having offended God and that you resolve, if you should live longer, never again to offend God. Let all this come from a true love of God who has given you countless gifts, while you in your ingratitude repaid him with injuries in exchange for his gifts.” He answered, “I do not understand; I am not capable of such things.” And thus he died, leaving us clear enough signs of his damnation. These and like examples warn us that, while we are in good health, we should unburden our conscience and do true penance, as if that confession would be our last.

Nonetheless, in a grave illness sacramental confession should be made with as much diligence as possible, and contrition should be especially aroused from true sorrow for past sins and a firm purpose of sinning no more, if one should live longer. Penance should be done not only for sins committed, but also for good works omitted to which we were obliged by our office or by charity. For many assess accurately enough the sins committed against God or neighbor, but readily forget or neglect their omissions. I can offer here a fairly useful example.

A very learned and pious bishop was sick unto death. A priest who was a mutual friend of ours came to him, and from him I got this story. The priest asked the bishop whether his conscience was sufficiently at peace. He answered that by the grace of God he could not recall anything serious which he had committed against God since his last confession. The priest asked further whether his conscience did not reproach him with any omissions, since the Apostle so carefully admonished his bishop, Timothy, “I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead by his coming and by his kingdom, preach the word, be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and teaching” (2 Tm 4:1–2). When he heard this, the good bishop groaned and said, “Indeed, omissions frighten me very much.” He said that, and from his eyes poured forth rivers of tears.

For those who are preparing to die well contrition is especially necessary. For confession without contrition or at least true attrition does not suffice for salvation. Even satisfaction without contrition is of no avail and can hardly be made by one who is ill. Contrition which includes charity can lead to salvation even without confession and satisfaction, when these cannot be made. For, as we said just before, “A contrite and humbled heart God will not despise” (Ps

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51:19). Thus we believe that the sick should earnestly seek to have contrition. We have a marvelous example of this in the Father, Saint Augustine. According to his biographer, Possidius, he ordered in his final and fatal illness that the penitential psalms of David be written out for him.¹ And lying in bed during those days of his illness he gazed upon the pages set against the wall and read them and wept continually and abundantly. He avoided being distracted by anyone. Almost ten days before he left his body, he asked his friends that no one enter his room except at the hours when the doctors came to see him or when meals were brought to him. Thus he was free for prayer all the remaining time. O blessed and wise man! After having received baptism and the forgiveness of sins of his past life, he lived forty-three years. During that time he assiduously preached the word of God until his last illness, wrote countless books highly useful to the whole Church, and lived an innocent and holy life without complaint. Yet in extreme old age and illness he allowed many days for contrition and penance so that he might weep continually and abundantly in reading the penitential psalms. Those two words, continually and abundantly, should be well noted. For he did not devote a day or an hour to contrition, but wept over his sins often and abundantly for many days. What kind of sins did that very holy man weep over? I imagine, only venial sins, so that he might go right to heaven, free not only from the flames of hell, but also from the fire of purgatory. And if a holy and wise man continually and abundantly wept over venial sins for so many days, what should they do who ought to make satisfaction to God not only for venial sins, but also for mortal sins?

Thus the ill, whose death is near, should really prepare themselves before they are sick so that in old age or illness they do not have to expiate serious sins, but only do penance for lesser offenses. They should strive to fortify themselves by communion and anointing against the snares of the devil so that, under the guidance of God and with the companionship of their guardian angel, they may happily arrive at the heavenly fatherland.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The seventh rule of the art of dying well,
 as death draws near,
 which is on holy viaticum.

The early Christians, in administering holy viaticum and the sacred anointing to the sick, first anointed the sick with extreme unction and then offered them the most holy Body of Christ. And in order to bring forth one or two proofs, there is in the writings of Lawrence Surius, in the first volume, *The Life of Saint William*, the archbishop of Bourges, who lived in the time of Pope Innocent III. In it we read, "He received the sacrament of anointing humbly and devoutly; after he had received it, he asked that he be immediately given the most holy eucharist so that, protected by such a guide for the journey, he might more safely pass through the ranks of the enemy."¹ The same thing is told of Saint Malachi, in his life written by Saint Bernard, namely, that he received the eucharist as viaticum after extreme unction.²

Besides these two proofs, which show the relation between extreme unction and the eucharist, two others can be offered which teach that viaticum was last, even though no mention was made of extreme unction. In *The Life of Ambrose*, written by Paulinus, we read that viaticum was given to Saint Ambrose when death was already imminent, so that he might breathe forth his spirit as soon as he had received viaticum.³ Simeon Metaphrastes writes exactly the same thing of Saint John Chrysostom in his biography of that man.⁴ Thus it is clear that among the early Christians the last sacrament was the viaticum of the Body of the Lord.

Now we first strengthen the sick with sacred viaticum, and then after several days, with the disease progressing, we anoint with holy oil. Each of these ways of proceeding has its reasons. The ancients thought that the venerable sacrament of holy oil was instituted both for recovering good health and for removing sins or the remains of sins. For thus Saint James speaks, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise

him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (Jas 5:14-15). Thus the ancients, hoping for bodily health for the sick person from the holy anointing, did not put off this sacrament until the doctors saw there was no hope of recovery. Rather, when the doctors diagnosed the disease as dangerous, they immediately had recourse to the holy anointing. The same point is illustrated by what Saint Bernard wrote in the *Life of Saint Malachi*, namely, that, when that holy man became gravely ill, he came down on foot from his bedroom which was in the upper part of the house to the church in order to receive first extreme unction and then viaticum.⁵ And after the reception of these sacraments he returned on foot, unassisted, to his room and bed. Nowadays when the sick hear extreme unction mentioned, they think that their life is over. For that reason relatives and friends postpone this sacrament as long as possible to avoid frightening the sick.

Another reason which moved the ancients to anoint the sick first and then offer them viaticum was that sins are forgiven in the sacrament of extreme unction, as we have already heard from Saint James. Thus extreme unction is called by some of the ancients the penance of the sick. Forgiveness of sins and penance is rightly placed first as a preparation or disposition for the lofty sacrament of the eucharist, which demands special purity.

Finally, the sacrament of the Lord's Body is the conclusion and, so to speak, the seal of all the sacraments. For those who are baptized as adults, such as Jews or Turks, are confirmed immediately after Baptism and are admitted to the sacrifice of the Mass and receive holy communion. So too penitents, upon completing their penance, always approach the eucharist, at least according to the ancient custom. Those who receive minor or major orders also receive holy communion. Finally, those who are joined in matrimony strengthen and confirm that sacrament with the sacrament of the eucharist. In our time the order has been reversed and not without good reason. For it often happens that extreme unction is postponed for a long time in order not to frighten the sick. And the danger is that the sick person in the meantime may either lose the use of his reason or be rendered incapable for some other reason of properly receiving the most holy eucharist. Thus we now give viaticum first. For it is better that these sacraments be administered to the sick in reverse order than that they lose the salutary benefit of one of them. For extreme unction can be conferred upon a sick person even in his

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death agony when he no longer understands or is aware of what is going on around him, provided only that he is still alive. For the dead are incapable of receiving any sacrament. This should suffice for the order of conferring sacraments upon the sick.

I come now to bringing the precious Body of Christ to the sick in a beneficial manner. First I will explain what should be done for the sick person before the sacrament is brought to him; then what the sick person himself ought to do in the presence of Christ's Body; and finally, how he should conduct himself once refreshed by that rich food.

As for the first point, I would suggest, unless something more useful should occur to the spiritual father, that the sick person carefully consider the words of Saint Thomas:

O sacred banquet,
In which Christ is eaten,
The memory of his passion is recalled,
The mind is filled with grace,
And the pledge of future glory is given us!

Thus he will first consider carefully that the holy eucharist is offered to us on our pilgrimage as food so that we do not faint on the path to the fatherland, especially at that time when, tired by a long journey, our forces are apt to wane. But this food is called a banquet and a sacred banquet at that. For although it is given in the form of bread alone, it is yet a whole and great banquet and not an ordinary, but a sacred one, not for the body, but for the soul. And there is added: "In which Christ is eaten," because beneath the species or accidents of bread there is the Body of Christ united with his soul and divinity. And thus it is a very great and most precious reality, a huge and very sweet banquet surpassing every savor of sweetness, but suited for nourishing and delighting the soul, not the body.

The fruit and usefulness of this food is explained by the words "The memory of his passion is recalled, the mind is filled with grace, and the pledge of future glory is given us." The first fruit of this banquet is the memory of the passion of Christ. The Body and Blood of the Lord is consecrated under the two species of bread and wine. Thus the species of bread represents the Body separated from the Blood, and thus dead, and the species of wine represents the

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Blood separated from the Body, although under both species Christ is whole and living. The Lord willed that these mysteries preserve in us the constant and daily memory of his venerable passion by which we have escaped every evil and attained every good. Thus the Lord himself said to his apostles, speaking of this sacrament, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19), and the Apostle Paul, explaining these words of the Lord, says, "As often as you shall eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). That is, as often as you approach this most holy mystery, you will recall that Christ the Lord laid down his life for you. And this commemoration will last until the second coming of the Lord, that is, until the end of the world. The Lord wanted us to be continually mindful of his passion and death, because he knew that remembering it would be most useful for us, so that, mindful of his wonderful love toward us, we would place all our hope in him in life and in death. For what could he refuse to those for whom he so readily laid down his life?

The second fruit of this heavenly banquet, mentioned in the words "The mind is filled with grace," is a singular privilege of the sacrament of the eucharist, when it is received with proper preparation. For bodily food is something that is eaten and carried to the stomach and yet refreshes, nourishes, strengthens, and invigorates all the members; and excessive abstinence from food not only leaves the stomach empty, but weakens, wears down, and makes all members deformed and feeble and ultimately kills. Similarly, this divine food refreshes, nourishes, and strengthens all the spiritual powers of the soul. With this holy food the memory is filled by the grace of the sweetest recollection of God's gifts, especially of the Lord's passion, by which we have been freed and saved. By this same food the intellect is filled with the grace of faith, not merely habitual, but also actual. Faith purifies the heart from many errors and fills the mind with the understanding of things of God, which gives birth to an incredible joy. Finally, by this food the will is filled with the grace of most certain hope and most ardent love. Since love is the queen of the virtues, it draws to itself all of the virtues, by the possession of which a man emerges as most rich in the wealth of heaven. Thus by this most divine sacrament the mind is filled with grace.

Next, "the pledge of future glory is given us" through this same salutary sacrament. The metaphor of a pledge is used because men

cannot refuse something promised when a pledge has been left as a guarantee of keeping the promise. The Lord left his Body in the eucharist as a pledge of heavenly beatitude. Thus one who dies after having received the Body of the Lord with due purity and reverence will show the pledge and will be permitted to enter the happiness of heaven. The pledge is shown by one who dies united with Christ by true charity, which is left in the soul by worthy reception of this salutary sacrament. For then the soul leaves the body as a bride "leaning upon her beloved" (Sg 8:5).

This is what Saint John wrote in Revelation when he said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rv 14:13), that is, blessed are the dying who die joined to the Lord as members to the head. "No one has ascended into heaven except him who has descended from heaven: the Son of Man who is in heaven" (Jn 3:13). Christ the Son of Man does not ascend without his body, of which he is the head. Moreover, only those die in the Lord who, when they die, cling to the Lord as members to the head. And all those who worthily receive the Lord a little before death do cling to the Lord.

Thus far we have considered the preparation of the sick person for receiving viaticum before the viaticum is itself present. As soon as the sacred viaticum is brought, the sick person should, as best he can, arise and adore his Lord, either falling to his knees or at least by a bowing of the head. For the Lord often provides strength so that even the dying can at that time arise and genuflect. That is what we read of Saint William, Archbishop of Bourges. "But when he learned that his Lord and Creator had come to him, he immediately leapt from his bed with his strength restored, as though all the fever had left him, to the amazement of those standing about, especially since he seemed close to his last breath. With a lively step he goes to meet his Savior, love providing strength, and on bended knee, he adores him, all aflood with tears. So that he might genuflect more often, he frequently kneels and gets up. With complete devotion he commends his agony to him, praying that he might deign to cleanse whatever remains to be cleansed, lest the wicked enemy find anything in him."⁶

I would recommend that, before the sick person receives the Body of the Lord, he recite or listen to those verses of Saint Thomas Aquinas which profess faith and arouse hope and kindle love. They are:

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Devoutly I adore you, hidden God,
Who truly lie beneath these forms;
To you my heart is wholly subject,
Since it wholly faints, in contemplating you.

Sight, touch, and taste are in you misled,
Only hearing can be safely trusted.
I believe whatever the Son of God has said,
No word is truer than the word of Truth.

Only the divinity was hidden on the cross;
Here the humanity is concealed as well.
Yet believing and confessing both,
I seek what the penitent thief sought.

I do not see the wound, as Thomas did,
Yet I confess that you are my God.
Make me ever more believe you,
Have hope in you and love you.

O memorial of the death of the Lord,
Living Bread, offering life to man.
Allow that my mind live from you
And that you always taste sweet to it.

Good Pelican, Jesus Lord,
Cleanse me, unclean as I am, by your blood,
Of which one drop could save
The whole world from every sin.

Jesus, whom I gaze upon now veiled,
I beg that what I thirst for may occur,
That, seeing you with face unveiled,
I may be blessed by the sight of your glory. Amen.

When he has recited or listened to these verses, after making the ordinary confession, which begins, "I confess to almighty God," and receiving the absolution and blessing of the priest, let him say, "Lord, I am not worthy," and then let him add with the greatest

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humility and devotion, "Into your hands, O Lord," and so on, and then receive in confidence the holy and heavenly food.

Once viaticum has been received, there remains thanksgiving for so great a gift of God. Besides vocal prayers which can be recited from pious prayerbooks, it is most beneficial for the one who has received viaticum to enter into the chamber of his heart and therein meditate in silence on the sweet words of the Lord Jesus found in Revelation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man opens his door to me, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rv 3:20). These words apply to those who return from holy communion. For the Lord, who instituted this sacrament in the form of a banquet, wants nothing more than that Christians approach this banquet. This is indicated by the words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," that is, I invite myself to a common feast that I may at the same time be fed. "If any man opens the door to me," assenting to the good desire I have inspired so that we may feast together, "I will come in to him" through the communion of the holy banquet, "and I will sup with him, and he with me." For God is said to sup with us when he is delighted by our spiritual progress, according to the words of the Prophet, "The Lord shall rejoice in his works" (Ps 104:31). And in the same place, "Let my speech be acceptable to him, but I will take delight in the Lord" (Ps 104:34). These words express the mutual delight and the sweet feast of God with the soul and of the soul with God. For God takes delight in the spiritual progress of the soul, and the soul takes delight in the gifts received from God. The chief among these is that God himself deigns to become glued in a way to the soul by this magnificent sacrament.

Let the faithful soul ponder after he has received viaticum how sweet and how fruitful it is to have Christ as its guest, while the sacred species remain, not merely as God, but also as man, to be able to deal confidently with him and share with him its dangers and trials in leaving the body, to commend himself to him wholeheartedly and to ask of him to hold back the temptor, to send his holy angel as companion and to bring him to the harbor of safety.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The eighth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on extreme unction.

The last sacrament is the sacred anointing which can bring great consolation if its power is understood and the sacrament itself is received at the proper time. The effects of this sacrament are two, as we said in the previous chapter: the health of the body and the remission of sins. We will briefly discuss each of these. Regarding the first effect Saint James says: "Is any one among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man" (Jas 5:14-15). That is surely a clear and solid promise.

There are two reasons why the sick nowadays so seldom get well after having received this anointing: One is that these days that sacrament is given to the sick later than it should be. For we should not expect miracles from this sacrament, such as there would be if the one breathing his last should suddenly recover. But if this sacrament is conferred on the sick when they first become seriously ill, we would often see health restored not in an instant, but in due time. This is the reason why extreme unction is not conferred upon those who are put to death by an executioner for crimes committed. For they can be freed from the danger of death only by the most obvious miracle. The second reason is that it is not always good for the sick person to be freed from his illness; rather it is better for him to die. The prayer of the Church that is said in this anointing does not ask unconditionally for the health of the sick man, but only if it is profitable for his eternal salvation that he get better at that time.

The second effect of this sacrament is the remission of sins. Saint James speaks as follows: "And if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (Jas 5:15). Since the remission of original sin properly pertains to baptism and since the remission of actual sin pertains both to baptism, if the ones baptized are adults, and to the sacrament of penance, theologians teach that the sins which are forgiven in the sacrament of extreme unction are the remains of sins. And

these fall into two categories. Sometimes the remains of sins refer to the mortal and venial sins themselves which were committed after the reception of the sacrament of penance and which were not later confessed. This might happen from ignorance if the penitent did not know that they were mortal sins or from forgetfulness if they did not come to mind so that the sick person did not seek out a confessor to whom he might confess them. The sacred anointing wipes away these remains of sin. And of this kind of sin Saint James states, "And if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him." The Councils of Florence and of Trent teach this clearly.¹

The second kind of remains of sin is a sort of horror and torpor, or sadness and grief, which comes over the sick. And to this the promise of Saint James refers, "And the Lord will raise him up" (Jas 5:15). For this sacrament cheers up the sick when they see the divine promises which are expressed in this venerable sacrament. And for this reason it should not be postponed until the last moment when the sick person hears and understands nothing.

The usefulness of this sacrament can be seen from the very form of the words. For the priest anoints with the holy oil mainly the five parts of the body in which are found the five senses, namely, the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, the sense of taste, and the sense of touch. Meanwhile the priest says, "May the Lord pardon you whatever sins you may have committed by sight, hearing," and so forth. And since that prayer is the form of the sacrament, it doubtless brings about what the words mean, unless something on the part of the recipient impedes this.

The great generosity and kindness of our God is readily seen in this sacrament by one who considers the great multitude of sins that flows from these five fountains of sin. For this reason, when Saint Malachi, an Irish bishop, whose life was written by Saint Bernard, had for a few hours delayed administering the sacrament of extreme unction to a noblewoman who was ill and she meanwhile died, he was seized with such sorrow that he lay the whole night in the room of the deceased with his priests, in prayer and grief, blaming himself that that good woman had not recovered her health by the sacrament of extreme unction or received so great a forgiveness of her sins from the generosity of the Lord.² Because that holy bishop was a friend of God, he obtained from his Lord by his prayers and tears that the woman rose, and she was anointed with great devotion by the holy man and received both of the effects of the sacred anoint-

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ing. For she clearly got well and lived on for many years and did not lose, as we piously believe, the pardon of her sins. This example of this great man faithfully committed to writing by another holy man can easily persuade us all of how we ought to treasure this venerable sacrament.

CHAPTER NINE

The ninth precept of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on the first temptation of the devil,
that is, on heresy.

As death approaches, the devil, our adversary, “as a roaring lion” (1 Pt 5:8), is true to his nature and swiftly runs to the prey and attacks the dying with all his might in that final struggle. He usually begins the battle with a temptation about faith. For the things which we believe not only surpass the senses, but also natural reason. And that very faith is the foundation of our justification. When that foundation is destroyed, the whole structure of good works collapses. This temptation is easily the most serious, because our struggle is with an opponent not only most learned and intelligent, but accustomed to this sort of battle from the beginning of the world. He seduced all the founders of the heresies, of whom many were very fine and wise men. Thus the Apostle rightly warns us, “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood,” that is, against men, “but against spiritual forces of wickedness on high” (Eph 6:12), that is, against demons who are spirits, and spirits most wicked and most sly and who see us from the airy heaven. Our weapons in this battle will not be disputations, but simple belief in the truth. For thus the princes of the apostles teach us. The Apostle Peter says, “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Pt 5:8–9). And the Apostle Paul says, “In all things taking up the shield of faith, with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one” (Eph 6:16). Thus according to the teaching of the

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apostles we should not dispute with the devil, but with the shield of faith seize all his darts and turn them back again, even though they seem to be lighted and burning, that is, effective and subtle.

Pietro Barozzi, the bishop of Padua, gives us a dreadful example in the three books he wrote on the manner of dying well.¹ In the second book he speaks as follows: "As I have heard, there were once two very learned men, easily the best in disputation of all who were from the same college, and also men of good conduct and very religious. One of these died and afterward appeared all in flames to the survivor as he was studying Sacred Scripture in his library. He was terrified at what he saw and inquired about the reason for such a great punishment. Groaning and grieving, the other answered: 'When I was about to leave this life, the old enemy came to me. And since he knew that I was quite learned, he began to ask me about my faith and what I believed. I replied that I believed in the contents of the Apostles' Creed. He asked me to clarify for him some things which seemed a little obscure. I explained to him what I had read in the Athanasian Creed. For I did not think that it could be put more clearly or truly. Then he said, "It is not as you think. What pertains to the Father is partially clear and true, but partially obscure and false. For he is eternal, but he is not always Father as he is always God. First he is God, later Father." When I cried out that that was heretical doctrine and the teaching of the devil, he said, "This is not a matter to be settled by shouting, but by reasons, if we are guided by the desire to discover the truth. I can easily state the reasons for my opinion. And you will free me from a great error if you can explain the reasons for yours." And I, poor wretch, trusted more than I should have in my talent and learning, and I began to dispute with him as I would with the rest of men. At last by the many arguments he raised against me and—what amazed me more—by proofs from Sacred Scripture he gradually led me to such terrible error that I thought neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit was God. Meanwhile, death seized my soul and presented it to the Judge such as it was. I was ordered by him to depart into this fire. Though it is the most raging fire, I would think it somewhat bearable if it would only end after ten million years. But it is eternal, and greater than any human era has seen. Thus I regret almost every hour the knowledge that cast me down to this dreadful destruction.' Saying this, he vanished.

"The other was startled both by the strangeness of the event

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and by the loss of his friend, but as soon as he came to his senses, he reported what he had seen to his closest friends and asked their advice in this matter. Their common decision was that each should commit himself to the faith which the Catholic Church holds. A little later he came down with an illness from which he was to die. And the ancient enemy, encouraged by reason of his success in the earlier debate, approached him as well. He asked about his faith and what he believed. He answered that he believed whatever the Church, his mother, believes. Again the ancient enemy asked what holy mother, the Church, believes. And he said, 'What I believe,' and in this fashion, in the hearing of those standing about, as if he were being questioned by someone, he kept saying, 'I believe what the Church believes, and the Church believes what I believe,' until he breathed his last. Thus it happened that, after having mocked the wiles of the enemy, he went off to heaven. After a few days, much changed in bodily appearance, he appeared to his friends whose advice he had sought in this matter. He thanked them for their counsel in virtue of which he ascended to the kingdom of heaven. We have considered it worthwhile to describe these events as they occurred so that everyone might learn by the misfortune or success of these men that one must not dispute with the devil about the faith, but that it is enough to commit oneself to the faith which the Catholic Church holds." This is what Barozzi said, to which we add nothing.

CHAPTER TEN

The tenth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on the second temptation,
that is, on despair.

The second temptation is usually one of despair, by which the devil often troubles not only bad men, but at times also some very good ones. He easily throws very wicked men into the pit of despair when death threatens. For he casts before their eyes all the sins which they

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committed while they lived. Venerable Bede writes of a certain soldier in the fifth book of the history of his people.¹ His words are: "There was in the time of Conrad, who reigned after Edilred, a layman who held a military office. But his interior neglect of himself was as displeasing to the king as his external efforts were pleasing. The king, therefore, constantly warned him to confess his sins and to leave his evil ways before he lost all time for repenting and amending his life by the sudden arrival of death. Although he was frequently warned, he spurned the words of salvation, promising that he would do penance later. Meanwhile, coming down with an illness, he took to his bed and began to suffer agonizing pain. The king came to see him—for he loved him much—and urged him even then to do penance for his sins before he died. But he said that he did not wish to confess his sins at that time, but after he had recovered from his illness, so that his companions would not reproach him for doing out of fear of death what he was unwilling to do when he was well. He spoke bravely in his own opinion, although he was pitifully seduced by the deceit of the devil, as became clear later. When the illness grew worse and the king came again to visit and instruct him, he shouted out suddenly in a wretched cry, 'What do you want now? Why have you come here? For you no longer can help me or save me.' But the king said, 'Do not speak like that. Come to your senses.' And he replied, 'I am not out of my mind. Rather, I have my bad conscience clearly before my eyes. A few minutes ago two handsome youths came in and sat next to me, one at my head, the other at my feet. The one brought forth a beautiful booklet, but very small, and he gave it to me to read. I looked and found written in it every good deed I have done. And they were few and trivial. Suddenly an army of evil and terrifying spirits arrived. Then the one who seemed most important because of his dark countenance and lead position brought forth a volume terrifying to see, enormous and almost too heavy to carry. He ordered one of his companions to give it to me to read. When I read it, I found that all my sins, not only those I committed by word and deed, but also those I committed by the slightest thought, were unmistakably described in horrid script.' Thus the poor wretch spoke in his despair, and not long after he died. The penance that he could have done in a short time with the fruit of forgiveness, he now performs eternally to no avail, while subjected to punishment." Thus Venerable Bede spoke. There we clearly see that our enemy, the devil, first got the

poor soldier not to do penance out of hope for a longer life and then reduced him to despair.

There is another example in the same author in the following chapter, where he speaks as follows. "I knew a brother whom I wish I had not known. I could even mention his name, if that were of any use. He was placed in a well-known monastery, although he lived shamefully. Stricken with a sickness and brought unto the point of death, he called the brethren. Much saddened and like one damned, he began to report that he saw hell opened and Satan plunged into the depth of Tartarus, while Caiphas and the others who killed our Lord were given over with him to the flames of vengeance. 'In their proximity,' he said, 'I see a place of eternal damnation prepared for me, alas! poor wretch that I am.' Hearing this, the brothers began to exhort him earnestly to do penance then while he was still in the body. He answered them, 'I have no time now to change my life, for I see that my judgment has already been decided.' Saying that, he departed without viaticum, and his body is buried in the farthest reaches of the monastery."² Thus spoke Bede. What that poor monk says, namely, that he did not have time to change his life, he says not out of truth, but from the devil's persuasion. For the Holy Spirit clearly proclaims through the prophet Ezechiel that God is always ready to welcome those who turn from sin to penance (Ez 18:21-23, 33:11-16). Pope Saint Leo teaches this even more clearly in the Letter to Theodore, the bishop of Frejus, in these words, "We cannot set measures for or limit the time of God's mercy. Conversion to God suffers no delays, as the Spirit of God says, through the prophet: When you turn and grieve, then you will be saved."³

I will add an example or two to show that even very good men are tempted by the devil to the sin of despair as they leave this life. There is found in the writings of Lawrence Surius *The Life of Count Elzear*, who lived in virginity with his wife Dalphina, and who after his holy death was renowned for many signs and miracles. Yet he suffered very serious temptations in leaving this life. The author writes as follows in the last chapter. "Finally, in the agony of death, he appeared exceedingly frightened, and from this we gather that he was in great turmoil over some accusations that were made against him. He cried out in his struggle, 'Great is the power of the demons. But the power and merits of the most holy Incarnation and Passion of Jesus Christ utterly overcomes it.' Crying out again after a little while he said, 'I have clearly won.' Again after a little time, he said

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with a great shout, 'I commit myself wholly to the judgment of God.' And having said that, he appeared composed and, blessed with a healthy glow and beauty and grace, he gave up his spirit."⁴

A much more frightening example is found in John Climacus, who reports that a certain very venerable monk, by the name of Stephan, having lived around forty years in the desert, known for his fasts, vigils, tears, prayers, and other virtues, finally came to death.⁵ When he came to his final agony, he was charged with many sins by the demons in order that they might bring him to despair. He was suddenly filled with amazement and began to answer with open eyes and a clear voice, at times like this: "It is true, it is really true. But I have destroyed the sin by penance and tears." At other times he said, "You have correctly accused me; I have nothing to say in response." And thus he died, leaving it in doubt whether he was saved or rejected. These and other such examples warn us to cleanse our conscience carefully before that hour and never to lose confidence in the Lord's mercy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The eleventh rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on the third temptation,
that is, on hatred for God.

Our adversary, the devil, not only strives as much as he can to rob the dying of faith and hope and to lead them into heresy and despair, but endeavors to separate God's friends from his friendship and to lead them into hatred for God and into blasphemies and the arts of magic. These men generally do not fear death or the pains of hell. For they hope to live a merry life in hell as companions of the demons whom they suppose are ruling in hell. Grillandos writes of this in the book *Fortunetelling*, question nine, number two, and Martinus del Rio borrows from him in the sixth book of *Magical Investigations*, chapter one, section three.¹ These authors say, as witches have often admitted after they have been captured, that the

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devil aims and works at nothing else than persuading them to persist in their opinion up to death. Even as they are brought to the place of punishment and the fire is lit, the devils promise they will openly snatch their bodies from the noose and from the flames and will cause them to feel no pain from contact with the flames. They promise that, even if it should happen that they die by the fire, their death will be free from torment and they will depart from the miseries of this life and be transferred into the happiness of the future life without feeling the punishment. They promise them they will be like the demons, endowed with the same strength, knowledge, riches, power, and pleasure that the devil himself possesses and enjoys. Thus the lying devil deceives them.

There are still others who, although they are not strictly speaking witches or magicians, are nonetheless so blinded by greed that they are only a little different from the infidels. Not without reason did the blessed Apostle call greed slavery to idols (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5).

I myself once visited a sick person close to death, and when I began to talk about preparations for leaving this life, he answered bravely and fearlessly, saying, "I wanted, sir, to speak with you, not on my behalf, but on behalf of my wife and children. For I am on my way to hell, and there is nothing you can do for me." He said this calmly, as if he were speaking of a trip to a villa or town. The devil had so subdued his soul that he had no desire or wish to be delivered from him. Though he was not a magician or a necromancer, he was, nonetheless, practicing a very dangerous art. Intent upon gain by fair means or foul, he seemed to have forgotten not only God, but also his own soul. The result is that I was helpless in trying to recall him to a better life despite all I said. Someone may want to know what art he practiced. I will tell you it so that his destruction may help other men of the same profession to come to their senses. He was a lawyer, one of those who do not care very much whether they undertake to defend a just or an unjust cause. And at times these men injure both parties, while they fill their purses.

I will add another example since I am on this topic. When a highly learned lawyer was speaking to me, explaining the merits of a certain case, I interrupted and said, "You seem to me to favor an unjust cause." Agreeing, he answered, "I am not an advocate for truth or for justice, but for my client. My duty is to expound the merits of the case I have undertaken to defend. Let the judge look to

the party for whom he should decide." I said, "I do not want you to believe me, but Saint Thomas Aquinas, a supreme and most holy teacher. For in the Second Part of *The Summa of Theology*, he speaks as follows: 'I respond. One must say that it is wrong to cooperate with someone in doing evil, by advising, or aiding, or consenting in some way or other. For advising and helping is in some fashion doing, and the Apostle says in writing to the Romans that not only they who commit sin, but also those who approve of them (Rom 1:32) are worthy of death. Thus, as was said above, all such persons are bound to restitution. However, it is clear that an advocate offers aid and advice to him whose cause he defends. Hence, if he knowingly defends an unjust cause, he undoubtedly sins gravely and is bound to the restitution of the loss which the other party incurs unjustly by reason of his help. But if he defends an unjust cause in ignorance, thinking that it is just, he is excused in accord with the manner in which ignorance is able to excuse one.'² That is what Saint Thomas says. Cardinal Cajetan explains the final words of Saint Thomas as follows: 'Whoever has defended either a just cause or an unjust cause, although he does not know it to be unjust, not because of ignorance, but with ignorance which does not excuse, unjustly defends the cause. Those who do not make the effort to discern and investigate whether they are undertaking a just or an unjust cause are clearly neglecting to get the knowledge that they are bound to have.'³ That is Cajetan's view."

To these temptations we can add another which helps more than it harms, although the devil uses it to do harm. For the enemy of the human race is in the habit of appearing with a terrifying countenance to the dying so that, if he cannot deceive them, he might at least impede them from alacrity and eagerness for prayer. Thus Severus Sulpicius relates that the devil appeared to blessed Martin as he was dying, and Saint Martin said to him, "Why are you here, you cruel beast? You are going to find nothing bad in me."⁴ Venerable Peter Damian also writes in *The Life of Saint Odilo* that shortly before his death the devil appeared to blessed Odilo, looking dreadful, and blessed Odilo, we read, said of him, "In the very hour of my decision, in that corner (for he pointed out the place with his finger) I saw a certain shape cruel and terrifying, which endeavored to horrify and frighten me with his cruel visage. But with the power of Christ comforting me, it could not harm me by any attack."⁵ Saint Adelinus, bishop of Sagium, writes in Lawrence

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Surius in *The Life of Saint Opportuna*, that the devil appeared to her as she was dying in the guise of the blackest Ethiopian, whose hair and beard appeared to drip hot and molten pitch.⁶ His eyes were as flaming iron which comes forth from the furnace shooting out many sparks. From his mouth and nostrils there came forth flames and sulphuric smoke.

The angel of the Lord explains why God permits holy men to be tried by such visions, in *The Life of Saint Aichard*, which survives in Lawrence Surius for the fifteenth of September.⁷ For when the devil was in a certain monastery, intent upon plunder, the holy guardian angel of that monastery said to the devil, "You will have here a task fruitful for the monks, but not profitable for you. For them it will serve as expiation; for you it will serve as confusion." The devil answered, "Am I obliged to assist these or any Christ-worshippers toward salvation?" The angel answered, "In this respect you are obliged to help them, because, if there is anything in them that ought to be pruned away, it will be removed by the fear of seeing you." Then a little later the same angel said to Saint Aichard about the devil, "Do not fear his countenance. No power is given him in this Christian family for working harm, except that the sight of him strikes a wholesome fear into the souls of those about to leave their bodies, so that if there is something in them that ought to be pruned away, it will be removed by fright over that terrible sight."

CHAPTER TWELVE

The twelfth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on the first remedy against the temptations
of the devil.

In the preceding chapters we have explained four temptations which often seriously trouble the dying. Against these temptations two kinds of remedies can be applied. One is for those who have the use of their reason and can hear and understand what is said to them. The other is a general remedy for all and most safe and useful.

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As far as the first one goes, if the temptation attacks the Catholic faith, it is in no way helpful, as we said above, to dispute with the devil. Generally the sick who are tempted are to be warned that, if the temptation concerns the nature of God who, according to the faith, is one in essence and three in persons, they should consider how little we know not merely about spiritual, but even about bodily creatures. In fact, many men find it hard to believe that single stars of the sky are larger than the whole orb of the earth; yet mathematicians easily prove that it is utterly true. But if such a bodily matter is not understood by learned men who still believe that it is so, why should they not believe what God himself revealed about his nature through the apostles and prophets and confirmed with many great signs and miracles?

But if the temptation concerns those things which we believe God has done and does every day, such as, above all, the changing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, while the accidents of bread and wine remain, one has to make use of examples of the many kinds of things we believe God has done, though we cannot account for any of them. Who can comprehend that the whole world was made out of nothing by the mere command of God? And yet many who believe this cannot be brought to believe the mystery of the eucharist. Likewise, who can believe that the bodies of all the dead that have been reduced to ashes or to dust or have been devoured by beasts or turned into plants will rise up in a moment by the word of the Lord? And yet all Catholics readily believe this and profess it in the Creed. Even Job believed this a few thousand years ago. For he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin" (Jb 19:25-26). On the basis of these and other such marvelous works of God which surpass our understanding, other things which the Catholic Church proposes for our belief can be easily accepted, since the Church is, by the testimony of the Apostle, "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (1 Tm 3:15). These and similar things can be proposed to those who are tempted about faith.

To those who suffer temptations about hope we should propose the clearly infinite magnitude of God's mercy which surpasses by far the number and mass of all sins. For the Holy Spirit speaks through David as follows: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and plenteous in mercy. The Lord is sweet to all, and his

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tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps 145:8-9). Likewise we should propose the propitiation of the Mediator, of which Saint John says, "He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2). We should also propose the power of penance, which, if it comes from a truly contrite heart, never will meet with rejection from God. For the Prophet wrote most truly: "A contrite and humbled heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:19). We should also propose the example of the prodigal son, who had barely uttered the words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Lk 15:21), when suddenly his father's heart was touched and he rushed to embrace his son. And he ordered that he be clothed in an expensive robe and that a ring be put upon his finger and that a splendid banquet be prepared, because his son had been lost and was found.

Finally, we should propose the example of Saint Paul, who, while he was still persecuting the Church, was touched by the grace of God and transformed from a persecutor into an apostle. He himself wrote that that had happened so that all sinners might be converted by his example and that no one, however wicked, should despair of God's mercy. He says, "This saying is true and worthy of entire acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. But for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus might show forth all patience, as an example to those who shall believe in him for the attainment of life everlasting" (1 Tm 1:15).

Those who are tempted by the demon with a grave temptation against the love of God and are stirred up to a hatred of God and a love of the devil should first be instructed that the devil is a liar, as our Lord says, "When the devil tells a lie he speaks from his very nature, for he is a liar and its father" (Jn 8:44). Where the expression "and its father" means that the devil is the father of lies, as Saint Augustine and Saint John Chrysostom teach.¹ For the devil told the very first lie when he said to Eve and through her to Adam, "No, you shall not die the death" (Gn 3:4). For God had told Adam that he should not eat of the forbidden tree, if he wished never to die. The devil, however, said that they should eat and that they would not die. Thus the devil deserves no trust since he is a liar and the father of lies.

Second, the devil has already been condemned to eternal fire with all his followers. For the Lord will say on the day of judgment,

“Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). Those are mistaken who subject themselves to the devil in the hope that they will reign with him after death in the underworld and will enjoy the greatest wealth and pleasures. Finally, experience shows that all the promises of the devil are false. For we have as yet found no one who has received the immense treasure the devil has promised. Nor have we found that anyone condemned to prison or to galleys or even to death by legitimate authority has been rescued by the devil.

If these three examples were seriously weighed by greedy men, there would probably be few or none at all who would dare to leave God, true and truly omnipotent and all-wise and all-good, for the most deceitful and most stingy and most miserable devil.

On the fourth temptation there is nothing for us to say, since it has already been sufficiently established that that temptation is more helpful than harmful for those who are dying. Yet if anyone wishes a remedy from Scripture for bearing it more easily, let him read or have someone read, while that horrible vision lasts, Psalm 27, which begins, “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Ps 27:1).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The thirteenth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is on the second remedy against the temptations
of the devil.

Having explained the first remedy against each kind of temptation of the devil, we will now explain the second remedy, which will be common to all temptations. This great and salutary remedy lies in prayer, whether it is the prayer of the sick person for himself or the prayer of others for him or the prayer of both the sick person and of others present. For it is certain that the prayer of those who fear God is of great value, especially since we know well that the devil can tempt someone only as much as the Lord allows him. For the

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devil is like a roaring lion or mad dog tied with an iron chain. He cannot bite at will, but only as God, who holds the chain in his all-powerful hand, allows him to bite. Saint Augustine stresses this, in explaining the words of the Psalm, "Say to my soul: I am your salvation" (Ps 35:3). Bringing forth the example of Job, he says, "God showed in the case of that holy man, Job, that the devil himself does not have the power of taking away these temporal things, unless he has received it from that supreme power. The devil could envy the holy man, but could he harm him? He could accuse him, but could he in any way condemn him? Was he able to take anything away? Could he harm even a nail or a hair, if he had not said to God, 'Send forth your hand'? What does 'Send forth your hand' mean? Grant the power. He received the power, and he tempted Job. Yet it is the one tempted who triumphs; the temptor is overcome. For although God permitted the devil to take away Job's possessions, he did not himself interiorly abandon his servant, but made for himself out of the soul of his servant a sword for overcoming the devil. How strong is he? I mean the man. Although he was conquered in paradise, he conquers on the dunghill. The one who was conquered there by the devil through the woman here conquers the devil and the woman."¹

The same point that Saint Augustine makes, namely, that the devil can do nothing unless God allows it, Saint Anthony and Saint Francis teach by example. Saint Athanasius, who wrote a biography of Saint Anthony, speaks as follows: "Surrounded by a multitude of demons, Anthony used to say, as if he were mocking his enemies, 'If you had some power, one of you would suffice for battle, but since you are broken because the Lord has removed your strength, you try to strike terror by your multitude. The very fact that you don the forms of irrational beasts is proof of your weakness.' Again he would say with confidence, 'If you have any power, if the Lord has given you any power over me, devour what has been given you. But if you are powerless, why are you struggling in vain? For the sign of the cross and faith in the Lord is a wall for us that cannot be stormed.'"²

Saint Bonaventure tells almost the same thing of Saint Francis. He says, "Seeking lonely places, he would go to abandoned wildernesses to pray at night where he frequently withstood terrible attacks of demons who, obviously fighting among themselves, were striving to distract him from the pursuit of prayer. But, armed with

heavenly weapons, the more violently he was attacked by his enemies, the more he was rendered strong in virtue and fervent in deed, confidently saying to Christ: 'Under the shadow of your wings protect me from the face of the wicked who have attacked me.' To the demons he said, 'Do whatever you will to me, evil and deceitful spirits. For you can only do what the hand of God allows, and I stand ready to bear with all joy everything which he decided should be inflicted.' Unable to bear such constancy of mind, the proud demons left in confusion."³ We have laid down as a solid foundation that the devil can do only what God permits; therefore, we can have no doubt that fervent prayer to God whether by the sick person or by those present is very effective, especially if those who are praying are friends of God.

We have a marvelous example of this in Saint Gregory in the Fourth Book of the *Dialogues*. He says that he encountered this example in his monastery and that he spoke of it in a sermon to the people. "That man," he says, "whom I remember having spoken of in homilies to the people, was a very restless lad, by the name of Theodore, who followed his brother into my monastery more out of necessity than out of choice. It greatly distressed him if someone said something on behalf of his salvation. Not only could he not do good; he could not even bear hearing it. With oaths and anger and ridicule he swore that he would never take the habit of the holy rule. However, during the plague that recently killed off many of the people of this city, he was stricken in the groin and brought close to death. And when he was drawing his last breath, the brethren gathered to help his passing with their prayers. His body was already dead in its extremities; only in his breast was there left the warmth of life. The brethren began to pray for him all the more urgently when they saw that he was now quickly passing away. Then suddenly he began to shout at the brethren present there and to interrupt their prayers with loud cries, saying, 'Go away, go away. I have been given to the dragon to devour, and because of your presence he cannot devour me. He has already got my head in his mouth. Leave so that he does not torture me more, but does what he is going to do. If I have been given to him to devour, why should I suffer delay because of you?' Then the brethren began to say to him, 'What is it that you are saying, brother? Make the sign of the holy cross.' He answered, 'I want to make the sign of the cross, but I cannot, as I am pressed down by the scales of this dragon.'

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When the brethren heard this, they prostrated themselves on the ground and began to pray with tears more fervently for his rescue. And, behold, the sick man suddenly began to cry out, 'Thank God, behold, the dragon, who had taken me to devour, has fled; driven out of me by your prayers, he could not stay. Only intercede for my sins, because I am ready to be converted and leave completely the life of the world.' Thus the man who was, as we said, already dead in the extremities of his body was restored to life and was wholeheartedly converted to God. And after his conversion he was long afflicted with trials; then finally his soul was freed from his flesh."⁴ Those were the words of Saint Gregory.

Therefore, those who are present at a deathbed should learn not so much to speak with the sick person as to pray ardently for him to God. Nor should one admit just any sort of person to visit the sick person in his last moments, but only pious and good men who have much influence with God by their prayers. For the constant and fervent prayer of the just man has much influence with God (Jas 5:16). And as the devil, because he has little time, makes every effort he can in that hour, so faithful friends ought much more to help by prayers and tears their brethren departing this present world.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The fourteenth rule of the art of dying well,
as death draws near,
which is about those who die,
not from ordinary illness,
but from some other cause.

Thus far we have explained how those who die from a long illness ought to prepare for death. It is now appropriate to say what they should do who face the danger of death not from long illness, but from some other cause. There are three kinds of men whom the danger of death threatens apart from ordinary illness. For some death comes unforeseen and yet certain; such are those taken by

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heart attack or struck by lightning. For others death comes neither unforeseen nor certain, but as highly likely; such are those who wage war with the enemy or struggle with the waves and blasts of wind on the high sea. For others death comes neither unforeseen nor uncertain; such are those who are put to death by the executioner after the sentence of the judge.

The men of the first class have no other remedy but the daily or even continual recollection of death. The very solemn warning of the Lord and Savior, "Watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour," (Mt 25:13) properly applies to them. It is a grave but valuable necessity that forces us to what is best and most profitable for us. If the Lord would say, "Watch, naked in the cold air until you freeze and expire with your flesh broken open on all sides," as the Forty Martyrs had kept watch, should we not do so in order to come safely and joyously to eternal happiness? And if he should say, "Watch, naked and bound to a gridiron, until, consumed in deep and bitter pain by the burning fire set beneath it, you pass from this life," as we read was done to Saint Lawrence, should we not readily do so in order to avoid the pit of eternal fire?

But the Lord, our God, does not give such an order to all of us, but he orders us to watch lest, while we sleep, the thief in the night should come and steal the gold of charity, the precious gems of chastity, the treasure of faith, or the other goods of true virtue while we sleep in sin. Thus, overcome by the deadly sleep of sin and caught off guard by death, we would suffer the loss of the heavenly kingdom and be cast into the pit burning with inextinguishable fire. Some die so suddenly that no assistance can be provided them. Granted, they are few; how do you know that you will not be among them? And if you are one of those few, what will the multitude of those who have escaped such danger matter to you? And so, while you can still escape such a terrible evil, listen to the advice of God our Father crying out and saying, "Watch, watch, you know neither the day nor the hour."

For the second sort of men, who either die a sudden death in war or perish at sea, lost in the waves during a violent storm, three things are necessary if they are to die a happy death. The first is that they do not go to war unless they are sure that the war is just. Or, if they do not take to arms willingly, but forced by their prince, at least they should not know that the war is unjust. For Saint Augustine teaches this in the book *Against Faustus the Manichee*.¹ For he

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writes that the situation of the prince who commands is different from that of the soldier who obeys. And he teaches that the prince may not fight a war unless he knows that the war is just, but that a soldier may, provided that he does not know that the war is unjust. The second is that in war they observe the laws of Saint John the Baptist, who, when asked by soldiers what they should do in order to be saved, answered, "Plunder no one, accuse no one falsely, and be content with your pay" (Lk 3:14). The last is that they do not permit mortal sin ever to cling to their hearts. Otherwise it will be easy for death that carries off many in battle to find them unprepared and hand them over to eternal death to suffer endless torture. Thus soldiers stationed in camps are in great danger of losing eternal life unless they are ever on guard and fight no less against the demons tempting them to sin than against mortal foes fighting for temporal glory.

These same points can be addressed to those who sail the sea amid danger. They ought first of all to avoid undertaking a voyage for a bad end, such as, to capture and to rob whomever they come upon, as pirates do. Second, if the voyage is undertaken for the sake of waging war, they should also observe the laws we have received from the holy precursor of our Lord. Finally, they should not dare to offend God by a mortal sin, since they are no further away from death than their ship is from the waters.

Men of the third sort can be called fortunate, if they know what is good for them. For they are put to death after being condemned either justly or unjustly. If justly, death can assist them in making satisfaction before God, provided they seriously detest their sins and freely accept death to expiate their sins. If they are unjustly put to death and forgive from the heart those who were the cause of their undoing, they are imitators of the Redeemer, who prayed to his Father for those who crucified him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). Consider too that they suffer far less in death than those who suffer a long and serious illness. Furthermore, since their senses are unimpaired and their mind is undamaged, they can more easily put forth effort on the proper reception of holy confession and the sacrament of our Lord's Body and on prayers than can those who are kept in bed, preoccupied with bearing various pains and with their natural strength usually weakened or even exhausted. Finally, in many places learned and pious men aid with much care and concern men

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who are about to be executed and teach them how to prepare for meeting death in a holy way so that, as they begin to die to mortal life, they may begin to live unto blessed immortality.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The happy death of those who have learned the art of dying well.

Having explained the rules of the art of dying well, there remains one thing more, namely, that we briefly explain the usefulness of this art. The task is easy and yet of great import. For one who dies well, dies a happy death. But he who dies well does not merely die a happy death, and he who dies a bad death does not merely die unhappily. One who dies well passes from a deadly and miserable life to a life that is eternal and blessed in every way. And one who dies badly passes from a life that seems long and happy to a life full of every labor and pain and that will never come upon an end of toil. Thus it is better called eternal death than life. For they will be men damned, who have died to face every labor and pain.

Holy Scripture clearly teaches us that it will be so. Of those who die well Saint John says in Revelation, "I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write: Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them' " (Rv 14:13). There are some authors who think that this statement applies only to the martyrs, but the more common and more correct interpretation teaches that the words of Saint John apply to all the saints who die piously in Christ. Certainly Saint Bernard says this in his letter, which is entitled *On the Maccabees*, " 'Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.' Not only those who die for the Lord, as the martyrs, but those who die in the Lord, as the confessors, will doubtless be happy. Thus two things, in my opinion, make death precious, the life one leads and the reason one dies, but the latter more so than the former. Yet the most precious death will be that commended both by the life led and the reason one dies."¹ Besides this, the Church, which is the best interpreter of the Scriptures, bids that the reading in Masses for all the

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dead be taken from that passage of Revelation. Saint John, therefore, says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," that is, blessed are all those who, when they die, are found "in the Lord," that is, are found joined to the Lord by true charity as living members of the head, which is Christ. Thus Saint Luke wrote of Saint Stephan's death, "He fell asleep in the Lord" (Acts 7:59), that is, joined to the Lord as a member to the head.

Saint John explains as follows why those who have died in the Lord are happy, "Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors." For the Holy Spirit clearly states that in the death of the saints all their laborious works are finished and endless peace begins and that not only do all labors cease, but there begins a most happy life filled with every kind of pleasure, because their works follow them. For works that are good and deserving of all consolation and pleasure, not for a time, but eternally, do not remain on earth, but follow the saints into heaven, according to the words of the Prophet, "He has distributed, he has given to the poor; his justice remains forever and ever" (Ps 112:9). The riches of a holy man are left on earth, or rather are consumed on earth, but the justice, generosity, and mercy by which earthly riches are shared with the poor "remains forever and ever." And it not only remains, but also makes a man most rich since he distributed his perishable wealth to the needy on earth. Not only do deeds of generosity follow them, but also works of wisdom, works of faith, of hope, and of love, works of fear of the Lord, of temperance, and of fortitude, works of chastity and works of religion. Finally, all good works follow them and gain for them ample and endless rewards. Thus he who has died well is indeed most happy, since he gains rest from all labors and the sum of all goods for eternity. Besides this true testimony of Scripture there are the visitations of the saints who are often present to good men as they die, in order to console and help them in their departure from the body and to hold in check the demons who are accustomed to strike terror at that time. Such a visitation is not the least of the joys of those who die a holy death.

I could here recount many stories, but I will be content with the examples extant in the *Dialogues* of Saint Gregory. Thus in the fourth book Blessed Gregory speaks of Ursinus the priest. "Ursinus the priest was near death when he began to cry out with great joy, saying, 'Welcome, my lords, why have you deigned to come to your little servant? I am coming, I am coming, I give thanks.' When he

repeated this again and again, those who were present asked him to whom he was saying this. He answered them in wonder, saying, ‘Don’t you see the holy Apostles gathering here? Don’t you see Blessed Peter and Blessed Paul, the princes of the apostles?’ Turning to them, he said again, ‘I come, behold, I come,’ and in the midst of those words he gave up his spirit. And by following them he testified that he truly saw the holy apostles. And it generally happens that great saints see visions at death lest they fear the penal sentence of their death, and while the company of the citizens from above is revealed to their mind, they are released from the chain of their flesh without the exhaustion of pain and fear.”²

Saint Gregory also relates in the following chapter of the same book that the martyrs Saint Juvenal and Saint Eleutherius came with great splendor to Probus, the bishop of the church of Riete, as he was dying, and that soon venerable Probus was released from the flesh and went off to heaven with those who came to him.³ In the following chapter this author says that Saint Peter appeared to Saint Galla, a servant of God, as she was ill and near to death, and indicated to her that all her sins had been forgiven so that she might depart from the world in safety.⁴ In the next chapter he reports that, when Servulus, a paralytic, was dying, songs of angels were heard in heaven and a marvelous odor was poured forth.⁵ In the following chapter he tells that for Romula, a servant of God, an immense number of holy souls came to her from heaven in a light incalculably bright and with the sweetest fragrance.⁶ In the next chapter he reports that his aunt, Tharsilla, first saw Pope Felix, a relative of hers, appear to her and say, “Come, for I welcome you in this mansion of light.” And then she was suddenly overtaken by fever and, as she neared her end, she saw Jesus coming to her and, stretching out toward him, she expired.⁷ And so sweet was the smell left in that place that its very sweetness showed that the source of all sweetness was there. He also writes in the following chapter that the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin, appeared with a chorus of virgins to a girl, Musa, and brought her as she died to the kingdom of heaven.⁸ Finally, he writes in the next chapter that holy angels were present to Stephen as he died.⁹

Thus from the testimony of Saint Gregory we know that not only angels, but also martyrs who have gone before, or the princes of the apostles, or the queen of heaven, or even Christ himself, the king of eternal glory, often assist good men and women as they leave

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this life. Only those who have been permitted to experience such great favors of God can say how great is this happiness, how great the glory, how great the joy of the heart for those who have learned to live well and to die a happy death.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The unhappy death of those who have neglected the art of dying well.

The Lord said of Judas the traitor, "It were better for that man if he had not been born" (Mt 26:24). We can conceive of no greater unhappiness than that of a man who veers away by sin from the end for which he was created. If other things, whether brute animals or plants or inanimate things, do not attain their ends, they still suffer no trouble once they cease to be. But if a man veers away from his end, which is life that is happy and endless, he does not stop existing and living, but leads a life worse than all death so that he constantly seeks death and never finds it. Hence, he who does not strive with all his strength to come to eternal happiness is more foolish than every fool and sillier than every dunce, since no one can fail of eternal happiness without falling into the abyss of eternal damnation.

To grasp correctly this matter of the highest moment I thought it worthwhile to consider briefly the words of the Apostle Paul, which are found in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares us for an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure in sublimity; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:17-18). These golden words of the Apostle are fully disclosed to the spiritual man, and by them the spiritual man most easily learns the art of living well and the art of dying well. But for the carnal and natural man these words are mere darkness and, indeed, Cimmerian darkness, as if they were Hebrew or Arabic for one who speaks Latin or Greek.

The spiritual man gathers from these words that the tribula-

tions undertaken for the sake of God, however severe, are very light and brief, even though they have to be borne for many years, since everything that has an end cannot be really long. He realizes that with God these tribulations produce merit of such great worth that with it one may purchase an immense and everlasting treasure of glory and of all goods. Wise men conclude from this that they should fear not tribulations, but sins, and that they should value highly not temporal goods, but eternal goods. Consequently, they live well on earth in order to reign happily in heaven, and in this way they live holy lives and die happy deaths.

But natural men, who do not have the spirit, who verbally profess that they believe “but by their works they disown” (Ti 1:16) the words of the divine Scripture, invert the words of the Apostle and say, if not aloud, at least in their heart, that need, ignominy, injuries, and tribulations are most serious and should be avoided and repulsed by every resource of their wit, even if it is necessary to lie, to cheat, to commit murder, to offend God, and after death to suffer hell. For who knows, they say, whether there is a hell anyway? And who has seen the eternal weight of glory? But we know by experience that need, ignominy, and injuries are bad; we know it with certitude; we touch it with our hands. The world and those who are of the world do not say such things aloud, but bear witness to them by their deeds, and that is the reason why a large number of men live badly and die most unhappily.

And to provide an example or two of the unhappy death of a man who has been lost, there is in Saint Gregory, in the fourth book of the *Dialogues*, the example of a certain Chrisorius. He was one of those whom I described just before, a man of politics, wise and well suited, as Saint Gregory says, for things of the world, yet proud and greedy.¹ When he reached the end of his life, he saw with open eyes the foulest spirits standing in his presence and violently threatening that they would snatch him off to the gates of hell. He began to tremble, to grow pale, to perspire, and to plead with loud cries for a respite, shouting and saying, “A respite at least until morning, a respite at least until morning.” But while he was shouting that, he was torn in the midst of those cries from the abode of his flesh. It is obvious, of course, that he saw those things not for his own sake, but for our sake, so that his vision might be of profit to us. It often happens this way with those who want to put off their conversion to the final hour of life, and of their number are those who, as the Saint

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Gregory teaches in the beginning of the fourth book, do not readily believe what they do not see, or, if they do believe, they do not believe strongly enough to make them live a good life.

Saint Gregory provides a second example in the same book about a certain hypocritical monk who was believed to be fasting, although he was eating and drinking in secret.² Saint Gregory writes that he had been condemned to hell while he was confessing his sin, although without repentance. For God willed that his hypocrisy be revealed. And he did not grant him the grace of repentance so that others might learn not to postpone confession and repentance until the end of life.

Having dealt with those who culpably did not learn the art of living well and thus did not have a happy passage from this life, I return to the words of the holy Apostle Paul, which are filled with salutary mysteries and lessons.

First of all, it is worth noticing how emphatically the Apostle makes light of his own merits, that is, his labors undertaken for Christ, and extols the glory of the kingdom of heaven, which is the reward of merit. He says, "Our present light affliction, which is for the moment" (2 Cor 4:17). Here he is making light of his own merits. The Apostle toiled with all his strength for about forty years. For, when he was called by Christ and came to his service, he was a young man. For he is so described in the Acts of the Apostles: Those stoning Stephan "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). But he lived in the service of Christ into old age, as he writes of himself to Philemon, "Since you are, as Paul, an old man" (Phlm 9). Thus the Apostle Paul spent in Christ's service all the years of his young manhood and of his maturity and a part of his old age, and he still says that the tribulations which he had constantly from his conversion up to his martyrdom were momentary. And what he says is true, if they are compared to an eternity of endless happiness. Nonetheless, considered by themselves, they lasted a long time.

He joins lightness with brevity in saying, "Our present light affliction which is for the moment." But he himself indicates how cruel and harsh those tribulations were, when he says in the First Letter to the Corinthians, "To this very hour we hunger and thirst, and we are naked and buffeted, and have no fixed abode. And we toil, working with our own hands. We are reviled and we bless, we are persecuted and we bear with it, we are maligned and we entreat,

we have become as the refuse of this world, the offscouring of all, even until now" (1 Cor 4:11-13). He adds the following in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, "In many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in lashes above measure, often exposed to death. From the Jews five times I received forty lashes less one. Thrice I was scourged, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was adrift on the sea; in journeying often, in perils from floods, in perils from robbers, in perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren; in labor and hardships, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor 11:23-27). These are the tribulations that he calls light. Although in themselves they are severe, the love of Christ and the greatness of the reward makes them seem with good reason to be very light.

The Apostle adds the greatness of the reward, saying: It "prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure in sublimity." Here, in accord with the custom of Holy Scripture to adapt itself to our capacity, the Apostle uses the image of bodily greatness to describe the reward of our labors. For a bodily reality is said to be large when it is lofty and long-lasting and wide and deep. He says the loftiness of the happiness of the blessed is "beyond all measure in sublimity," that is, the reward of our labors will be sublime beyond measure, that is, most high, so that no greater honor, dignity, or sublimity can be thought. He calls its length "eternal," for it will have no end, and in comparison all duration can be called brief and momentary. Its width and depth he describes as a "weight of glory." The word *glory* means that happiness will be like splendor or light that is everywhere diffused and fills everything. The word *weight* indicates the depth of something solid and full, that is not superficial and empty, but most solid and full. Thus the happiness of the saints will be something sublime beyond all limit and measure, that is, eternal and most solid and full.

But because natural men, such as are the citizens of this world, do not understand these things, he adds, "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal." This is the true and entire reason why so few learn the art of living and dying happily and well: because they either do not consider at all or do not seriously consider those things which are not seen and

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which are eternal. They are wholly occupied in considering the beauty and utility of bodily and passing things which are seen. Therefore, there is only one difference between brute beasts and natural men who lack the Spirit. The former consider only what is present because they do not have a mind capable of reason, by which alone future and everlasting things can be considered; whereas, carnal and natural men do not think about and do not consider future and everlasting things, because they are caught by the bird-lime of concupiscence and refuse to turn their minds from present things and to turn them toward things to come, which are alone truly great, valuable, and everlasting. This should suffice for the first consideration of the Pauline statement.

The second consideration, no less useful and salutary, applies to those who have gone down to hell. For punishment has opened the eyes of their mind which in this world had been closed by sin. They are the ones who most clearly realize that the goods of this world, that is, riches, honors, pleasures, kingdoms, and empires, were for them momentary and light and that, on account of them, nonetheless, they lost goods that are most eminent and everlasting goods. Hence, they groan unceasingly and find no consolation because, while they were on earth, they were stupid enough to lose goods having "an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure in sublimity" for the sake of fragile and perishing goods that are not so much goods as shadows of heavenly goods.

Let us listen to the words of the foolish in the Book of Wisdom. For the Holy Spirit wanted to report in this Book of Wisdom their words which are surely useless to them, but which can be beneficial for us if we so wish. "Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice has not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding has not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What has pride profited us? Or what advantage has the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runs on, and a ship that passes through the waves, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters; or as when a bird flies through the air, of the passage of which no mark can be found" (Wis 5:6-11). Such are the Wise Man's words. From this we gather that natural men will do penance in hell, not only because they have lost great, eternal goods on

account of small, temporal ones, but also because they completely wore themselves out in the labor of acquiring and keeping goods that will perish. And it is obviously true and a frequent occurrence that those who condemn temporal goods live more joyfully and happily than those who have an abundance of riches and honors.

Certainly the Apostle Paul, whose words we have set out to explain, says of himself, "I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our troubles" (2 Cor 7:4). In *The Life of Saint Anthony*, Saint Athanasius reports that Anthony never seemed sad although he had given up all his temporal goods.³ The same thing can be said of all the saints, however much they were poor and however much they labored in prayer and fasting and mortification of their flesh. Thus those who have no fear of losing everlasting goods in order to acquire, preserve, and increase temporal goods, not only utterly lose everlasting goods, but to a large extent surrender internal joy and consolation because of those temporal goods. Thus, in seeking earthly happiness, they lose happiness on earth and in heaven.

And so is it not right that we who are still on the journey begin to grow in wisdom by the example of those who have preceded us? Surely, if someone warns us while on a trip that a road we have set out on does not lead to where we want to go, but to a precipice or a den of thieves, we would all welcome the warning with gratitude and take another road immediately. But if we react this way in a bodily or temporal danger, it is surely right that we do so even more willingly and quickly in a danger that is both spiritual and corporeal, temporal and everlasting.

Finally, there remains for us to consider those men who are so carnal and natural that they do not place much value on the loss of eternal life and the heavenly glory that surpasses all understanding. They should be warned that, if they do not place great value upon heavenly glory which they have never seen, they should at least not despise fire and sulphur and other bodily punishments which they do know and which will be found in hell in their fiercest form. For pleasure of the flesh which is present, light, and for the moment will produce in the wicked an eternal weight of misery beyond all measure in the depth of hell (2 Cor 4:17). And Christ the Lord will make this evident on the last day in a few words, saying, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

But blessed John in the Book of Revelation explains more exten-

sively what sort of torments have been prepared for the devil and his angels and those men deceived and seduced by the devil. In the Book of Revelation we read as follows about the devil, the prince of the wicked, "And the devil who deceived them was cast into the pool of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rv 20:9-10). And in the following chapter he says of the rest who are condemned to hell, "But as for the cowardly and unbelieving, and abominable and murderers, and fornicators and sorcerers, and idolators and all liars, their portion shall be in the pool that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rv 21:8). Here only the first group needs explanation, for the rest clearly involve sins. Saint John calls "cowardly" those who do not dare to resist the tempter, whether the devil or man, but immediately yield and consent to him. Saint James writes to these people, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7). There are many, even countless men who have not learned to fight the battles of the Lord and without any resistance accept wounds from the devil and die the first death, which is mortal sin. And because they are also cowardly in doing penance, not daring to chastise and subdue their body, they also fall into the second death, which is hell. Thus John correctly put the cowardly in first place, because cowardice leads a countless number of men to hell.

How will carnal men respond at this point? By our own experience and that of others we have all learned that temporal goods are momentary and light, but Holy Scripture, in which there can be no falsity, clearly bears witness that the torments of hell are most grievous and will last without end. From this it follows that the summation of the whole art of dying well is the content of the three following propositions or the conclusion of the following argument.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A summation of the whole art of dying well

Both the consolation and the tribulation of the present life are momentary and slight, while both the consolation and tribulation of the life to come are everlasting and immense. Thus those who despise

the consolation and tribulation of the life to come are fools. The first proposition of this argument is known by experience, the second is well known from the Scripture of the Holy Spirit, and the third follows from the preceding two. Thus, if anyone wants to master easily and quickly the art of dying well, he should not be content with reading this book or others like it, but should carefully consider the great difference between the momentary and the everlasting, between the slight and the immense, not once, but often, and not with an eye on learning, but with the intention of living well and dying happily. If he wants to be solidly confirmed in this highly useful truth, he should consider the examples of those who went before us, whether they were wise or foolish, that is, whether they died happily by living well or perished eternally by living badly. In order to spare the readers the task of finding examples, I will offer three pairs of examples, the first of kings, the second of ordinary men, and the third of clerics. I will take them all from Scripture.

The first will be the example of Saul and David. When Saul, the first king of the Hebrews, was a poor man not living a public life, he was so good that, as Scripture bears witness, there was none better than he among the children of Israel. After he was made king, he changed his life and conduct so that there was then no one worse than he. He pursued David, who was innocent, to the point of death, simply because he suspected that he would succeed him on the throne. Finally, after he had reigned twenty years, he was killed in battle and went to hell. After Saul's long pursuit, the faithful and good David was declared king, and he justly governed the realm for forty years, during which he suffered many trials and finally died in peace.

Now let us compare the consolations and tribulations of each and see which of them learned the art of living well and dying well. The pleasure of ruling, which is usually very great, Saul possessed neither clearly nor firmly while he lived because of the hatred with which he pursued David. Thus he tasted the sweetness of his twenty-year reign along with the bitterness of envy. After those years had passed, all the joy of life fled from him, and pure and everlasting disaster took its place. And now for almost two thousand and seventy years his nobler part, that is, the soul, has lived in pains of the greatest sort and—what is worse—of endless duration. On the other hand, David lived seventy years and reigned for forty. Though he experienced tribulations that were neither slight nor

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few, he also received from God's revelations frequent great consolations, which he expressed in his delightful psalms. After his death he went to refreshment, not to punishment, since he entered into the bosom of Abraham with the holy patriarchs. After the resurrection of Christ the Lord he rose to the kingdom of heaven with Christ himself.

Now let the reader judge whether wicked men's passing from the body, although they might be kings and emperors, is not truly unhappy and the passing of just men, even if they are kings and emperors, is far happier. Saul, as I said, reigned for twenty years; after death he remained over two thousand years in the fire of hell without any comfort. What comparison is there between twenty years and two thousand? Who would chose twenty years of the highest and purest pleasure if he knew with certainty that, because of that pleasure, he would remain for over two thousand years in a blazing furnace? Would there be any man so senseless as to want to undergo the greatest of all torments for years, not let us say for two thousand years, but for two hundred, so that afterward he might enjoy for twenty years even the greatest pleasure? But what if we add that the torment of hell will last not two thousand years, but will have no end? Surely the eternity alone of the torments that will last without any cessation and without any respite is sufficient to bend a heart of iron and a breast of bronze to repentance. The reader himself can apply the same consideration to David's momentary and slight tribulation and to the immense and everlasting pleasure, which he obtained after his death in the heavenly kingdom, although the torments of hell move us more than the joys of paradise.

The second example will be that of Lazarus and the banqueter from the Gospel of Saint Luke (Lk 16:19-31). The wealthy banqueter, who "used to clothe himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted every day in splendid fashion," rejoiced for a short time with his friends. In contrast, Lazarus, a beggar, lay sick, at the gate of the rich man, "covered with sores, and longing to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one gave them to him" (Lk 16:19-21). But soon everything was changed: The rich banqueter died and went down to hell; Lazarus died and was borne by angels to a place of refreshment and the bosom of Abraham. After his brief comfort the rich man began to be tortured in the flames of eternal fire and is even now being tortured there and will be tortured there without any respite or pause forever and ever. Good and patient

Lazarus, after his brief trial, entered into rest in the bosom of Abraham, and after the resurrection of Christ he will journey to the heavenly and happy kingdom where he will be blessed without end. Surely, if we had lived at that time, few if any of us would have wanted to be like Lazarus, but all or almost all of us would have wanted to be like the rich man. Yet now we all regard Lazarus as most happy and the rich man as most wretched. Why, therefore, while we have the option, do we not choose the virtue of Lazarus rather than the vices of the rich man? We need not blame riches, for Abraham and David and many other saints were wealthy. But we should condemn overindulgence, luxury, vanity, lack of mercy, and the other vices which brought the rich man to hell. Nor do we consider in Lazarus only his poverty and sores; we praise his patience and piety. It is truly amazing that, although we know all these things and judge the rich man a fool and Lazarus a wise man, we still find many who do not hesitate to imitate the rich man in their life, although they can be sure that their punishment will be similar to that of the man whose vices they chose to imitate.

There remains the third example, of Judas the traitor and Saint Matthias who replaced Judas as an apostle. Judas was surely unhappy in this world and even unhappier in the next. He followed our Lord and Savior for three years, seeking to fill his purse by sacrilegious theft. He was not content with the money he received from the communal alms, but under pressure from the disease of greed, he went so far as to sell our Lord and Master. A little later he was reduced to despair by the devil; he gave back the money, hanged himself, and lost at once both temporal and eternal life. This is why the Lord pronounced that terrible sentence about Judas, "It were better for that man if he had not been born" (Mt 26:24). Saint Matthias, who succeeded Judas, that is, after having been elected to his position, underwent slight labor for a short time along with an abundance of heavenly delights. But now with all labor and pain ended, he reigns in heaven, happy with Christ, whom he most faithfully served on earth.

This comparison of Judas with Matthias applies to bishops and religious. For Judas was an apostle of Christ and, thus, named a bishop. Saint Peter interprets the words of the psalm, "And his bishopric let another take" (Ps 109:8; Acts 1:20), as speaking of Judas and Matthias. And Judas was numbered among religious men, since Saint Peter says of all the apostles, "Behold, we have left all and

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followed you; what then shall we have?" (Mt 19:27). When Judas, the most unhappy of all men, had fallen from the high state of perfection, he lost even the small gain he had so wickedly acquired by giving it back. Having become his own executioner and having been condemned to everlasting punishment, he can serve as an example for all clerics and religious so that they see how they should walk and what danger threatens them if they do not measure up to the perfection of their state by living a holy life. For by dying, Saul and the banqueter went from temporal happiness to everlasting bitterness. Judas had no temporal happiness, but only a shadow or a hope of happiness, and yet he killed himself and came to a destruction that was everlasting and more horrible than was the destruction of Saul and the banqueter. But even if Judas surpassed all mortals in the acquisition of riches and later came to eternal poverty and the pains of hell that are to last without end, as indeed did happen, what would the mass of wealth have profited him?

Therefore, let the argument stand firm and true, which we set out at the beginning of this chapter and which we now repeat in the words of the Apostle: "For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure in sublimity; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:17–18).

NOTES



Notes to Chapter One

1. *The Mourning of the Dove* c. 9, where he cites Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* [Historia Ecclesiastica] V, c. 12 [PL 95, 247–252].
2. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* [Scala Paradisi], Step VI [PG 88, 797–798].

Notes to Chapter Two

1. The Council of Florence, DS 1304–1306.
2. Cf. Saint Thomas, *Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences* IV, d. 47.
3. Saint Cyprian *The Unity of the Catholic Church* [De catholicae ecclesiae unitate] [PL 4, 527].
4. Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Joel* [Commentariorum in Joelem] c. 3 [PL 25, 979].
5. Saint Denis the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy* I, c. 14 [PG 3, 321–322]; Saint Thomas, *The Summa of Theology* Ia, q. 50, a. 3.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. *The Ascent of the Mind to God; The Eternal Happiness of the Saints; The Mourning of the Dove; Sermons on the Four Last Things*. For the first three cf. *Opera Omnia*, Volume VI (Naples, 1862) 205–396; for the fourth, cf. *Trattati delli quattro novissimi e della miseria dell' humana vita*, trans. from Latin by Count Camillo de' Arbieri (Rome, 1621); these are extracts from Bellarmine's *Conciones habitae Lovanii ante annos circiter quadraginta* (Cologne, 1605).

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Note to Chapter Four

1. Theophylactus, *Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians* [Expositio in Epistolam I ad Corinthios] c. XV, v. 28 [PG 124, 767–768], and Saint Augustine, *The City of God* XXII, c. 30 [PL 41, 801–802].
2. Saint Jerome, *Letter 55 (To Amandus)* [Epistola LV] c. 5 [PL 22, 564–565].

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine* c. 31 [PL 32, 64].
2. Saint Ambrose, *The Duties of Ministers* [De officiis ministrorum] II, 28, 142 [PL 16, 150]; the translators have not been able to locate the reference to Saint Gregory.
3. Saint Augustine, *On Caring for the Dead* [De cura pro mortuis gerenda ad Paulinum] c. 1 [PL 40, 593].

Note to Chapter Six

1. Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine* c. 31 [PL 32, 63–64].

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. Lawrence Surius, *The Life of Saint William, Archbishop of Bourges*, Tome I, for January 10; Surius's many-volumed work on the lives of the saints (*De probatis sanctorum historiis* [Cologne, 1570–1575]) was revised in 1617–1618 by another Carthusian.
2. Saint Bernard, *Life of Saint Malachi* [Vita sancti Malachiae] XXXI, 71 [PL 182, 1115].
3. Paulinus of Milan, *Life of Ambrose* c. 47 [PL 14, 46].
4. Simeon Metaphrastes, *Life of Saint John Chrysostom* [Vita S. Joannis Chrysostomi] c. 61 [PG 114, 1206].
5. Saint Bernard, *Life of Saint Malachi* XXXI, 71 [PL 182, 1115].
6. Lawrence Surius, *The Life of Saint William*, Tome I, for January 10.

Notes to Chapter Eight

1. The Council of Florence, *DS* 1324–1325; the Council of Trent, *DS* 1696, 1717.
2. Saint Bernard, *Life of Saint Malachi* XXIV, 53 [PL 182, 1103–1104].

NOTES

Note to Chapter Nine

1. Pietro Barozzi, *The Way to Die Well* [De modo bene moriendi] (Venice, 1531).

Notes to Chapter Ten

1. Venerable Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of England* V, c. 13 [PL 95, 252–253].
2. *Ibid.*, c. 14 [PL 95, 254].
3. Saint Leo, *Letter* 108 (To Theodore, Bishop of Frejus) [Epistola ad Theodorum, episcopum Foroiuliensem. Epistola CVIII] 4 [PL 54, 1013].
4. Lawrence Surius, *The Life of Count Elzear*, Tome V, for September 27, last chapter.
5. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 7 [PG 88, 813–814].

Notes to Chapter Eleven

1. Paolo Grillando, *Liber de hereticis et sortilegiis* (Lyons, 1536); Martinus del Rio, S.J., *Disquisitionum magicarum libri VI* (1599).
2. Saint Thomas, *The Summa of Theology* IIa–IIae, q. 71, a. 3.
3. Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Commentary on the Summa of Theology* IIa–IIae, qu. 71, a. 3; Cajetan's *Commentary* is printed in the Leonine edition of the works of Saint Thomas. Cf. *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, Volume 9 (Rome, 1897).
4. Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin* [Vita Sancti Martini. Epistola tertia] XI, 2 (PL 20, 159).
5. Peter Damian, *The Life of Saint Odilo* [Vita s. Odilonis] [PL 144, 944].
6. Lawrence Surius, *The Life of Saint Opportuna*.
7. Lawrence Surius, *The Life of Saint Aichard*, for September 15.

Note to Chapter Twelve

1. Saint Augustine, *Homilies on John's Gospel*, Homily 42, 14 [PL 35, pt. 2, 1705]; and Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, Homily 54, 3 [In Joannem Homiliae. Homilia 54] [PG 59, 299].

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Notes to Chapter Thirteen

1. Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the Psalms*, On Psalm 34, Sermon 2, 7 [PL 38, 327].
2. Saint Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony* [Vita sancti Antonii] 9 [PG 26, 858].
3. Saint Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis X*, 3.
4. Saint Gregory, *Dialogues IV*, c. 38 [PL 77, 389–392].

Note on Chapter Fourteen

1. Saint Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichee* [Contra Faustum Manichaeum] XXII, c. 75 [PL 42, 448].

Notes to Chapter Fifteen

1. Saint Bernard, *Letter 98* (To Someone Unknown, Concerning the Maccabees) [Epistola XCVIII. Ad ignoratum, de Machabaeis] 8 [PL 182, 234].
2. Saint Gregory, *Dialogues IV*, c. 11 [PL 77, 337–338].
3. *Ibid.*, c. 12 [PL 77, 337–340].
4. *Ibid.*, c. 13 [PL 77, 339–342].
5. *Ibid.*, c. 14 [PL 77, 341–344].
6. *Ibid.*, c. 15 [PL 77, 343–348].
7. *Ibid.*, c. 16 [PL 77, 347–348].
8. *Ibid.*, c. 17 [PL 77, 347–350].
9. *Ibid.*, c. 19 [PL 77, 352].

Notes to Chapter Sixteen

1. Saint Gregory, *Dialogues IV*, c. 28 [PL 77, 391–394].
2. *Ibid.*, c. 28 [PL 77, 393–394].
3. Saint Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, possibly c. 14 [PG 26, 863–866].