P. Raniero Cantalamessa OFMCap

“TEACH US TO COUNT OUR DAYS ARIGHT,

THAT WE MAY GAIN WISDOM OF HEART”

(Ps 90:12) [[1]](#footnote-1)

**First Sermon of Advent 2020**

An Italian poet, Giuseppe Ungaretti, expressed the state of mind of soldiers in the trenches during the First World War with a poem of only ten words

We are

Like in autumn

The leaves

On the trees.

At this time in our lives, the whole of humanity is experiencing this same sense of precariousness and uncertainty due to the corona virus pandemic.

‘The Lord – as Saint Gregory the Great wrote – sometimes instructs us with words, while sometimes he does so with facts.’[[2]](#footnote-2) In the year marked by the great and dreadful ‘fact’ of the corona virus, we strive to draw from it the teaching that each of us can draw for our own personal and spiritual live. We can only share this kind of reflections amongst us believers, as it would be a little unwise to propose them to all without distinction, lest it should increase the uneasiness towards faith in God that the pandemic produces in some people.

The eternal truths we wish to focus on in our reflections are: first, that we are mortal and ‘we have no stable dwelling on earth’ (**Hb** 13:14); secondly, that life does not end with death, because eternal life awaits us; thirdly, that we do not face the waves alone on the small boat of our planet because ‘the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.’ (Jn **1:14**). The first of these three truths is **the** object of experience, the other two of faith and hope.

**‘Memento mori!’**

We shall start by meditating on the first of these ‘eternal maxims’: death. “Memento mori’, Remember you will die. The Trappist monks chose these words as the motto of their Order and they have it written everywhere in their cloisters.

You can talk about death in two different ways: either in the light of the kerygma or in the light of wisdom. The former consists in proclaiming that Christ has overcome death; that it is no longer a wall for everything to crash against, but it is a bridge to eternal life. The sapiential or existential way, on the other hand, consists in reflecting on the reality of death as it is accessible to human experience, to draw from it lessons to live a good life. It is in this perspective that we want to place the present meditation.

The existential way is the way death is approached in the Old Testament and in particular in the Wisdom books: ‘Teach us to count our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart,’ as the author of the Psalm asks God (Ps 90:12). This way of looking at death does not end with the Old Testament, but it also carries on in the Gospel of Christ. Let us remember his warning: ‘Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.’ (Mt 25:13), the conclusion of the parable of the rich man who planned to build larger barns for his harvest: ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ (Lk 12:20), and again Jesus’ saying: ‘What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?’ (cf. Mt 16:26).

The tradition of the Church has made this teaching its own. The Desert Fathers treasured the thought of death so much that they made it a constant practice and refreshed it by any means necessary. One of them, who span wool for a living, had made it a habit of dropping the spindle every now and then and of ‘setting death before his eyes before picking it up again.’[[3]](#footnote-3) In the *Imitation of Christ* we find the following exhortation: ‘In the morning assume you will not get to the evening. Once the evening has come, dare not rely on the following morning’ (I, 23). Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori wrote the treatise *Preparation for Death*, which for centuries was a classic of Catholic spirituality.

This sapiential way of talking about death can be found in every culture, not only in the Bible and in Christianity. Its secularized version is also present in modern thought and it is worth briefly touching on the conclusions drawn by two thinkers whose influence is still strong in our culture.

The first modern thinker in question is Jean-Paul Sartre. He overturned the classic relationship between essence and existence, claiming that existence precedes and prevails on essence. To put it simply, this means that there is no order or scale of objective values - God, the good, values, natural law, – which precede everything else and which humans have to live by, but everything has to start from one’s own individual existence and freedom. Every person must devise and fulfill their own fate, just as a river flows on and digs its own bed. Life’s plan is not written anywhere, but it is determined by one’s own choices.

Such a way of understanding existence completely ignores death as a fact and it is therefore disproven by the very reality of existence it wants to affirm. What can human beings plan if they do not know nor can they control whether they are still alive tomorrow? Sartre’s attempt resembles that of a convict who spends all his or her time planning the best route to follow to move from one wall of their cell to the other.

More plausible on this point is the thought of another philosopher, Martin Heidegger, who starts off from similar premises and works within the same context of existentialism. By defining man as ‘a-being-for-death’[[4]](#footnote-4), he does not turn death itself into an accident putting an end to life, but into the very substance of life, that is to say what it is made of. Man cannot live without burning life and making it shorter. Every minute that goes by is taken from life and handed on to death, just as, as we drive along, we see houses and trees quickly disappearing behind us. Living for death means that death is notonly *the end*, as in the conclusion, but *the end*, as in the goal, of life. One is born to die, not for anything else.

What is, then, – the philosopher asks - that ‘hard core - certain and insurmountable,’ which human being are called to by their conscience and which is to act as the foundation of their existence, if it wants to be a ‘genuine’ one? The answer is: its nothingness! All human possibilities are actually ‘impossibilities.’ Any attempt to plan oneself and to raise oneself is a leap that starts from nothing and ends into nothing[[5]](#footnote-5).All we can do isturn necessity into a virtue by loving our Destiny. A modern version of the Stoic ‘amor Fati’!

Saint Augustine had anticipated even this insight of modern thought on death, but he drew a totally different conclusion from it: not nihilism, but faith in eternal life.

When human beings are born – he wrote – many hypotheses are made: perhaps they will be beautiful, perhaps they will be ugly; perhaps they will be rich, perhaps they will be poor; perhaps they will live long, perhaps they will not. But of no one it is said: perhaps they will die or perhaps they will not die. This is the only thing that is absolutely certain about life. When one suffers from dropsy [this was the incurable disease at the time, nowadays others are], we say: ‘Poor thing, he or she has to die; they are doomed, there is no remedy.’ But should we not say the same of those who are born? “Poor thing, she has to die, there is no remedy, she is doomed!”. What difference does it make if it takes longer or shorter? Death is a mortal illness we are infected by when we are born.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Dante Alighieri summed up the whole of this Augustinian view in a single verse, as he efined human life on earth as ‘the life that is a race to death.’[[7]](#footnote-7)

**At the school of ‘Sister Death’**

With the quick advancement of technology and of scientific achievements, we ran the risk of being like that man in the parable, who says to himself: ‘Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!’ (Lk 12:19). The current calamity has come to remind us how little depends on human will when it comes to ‘planning’ and determining the future.

A sapiential view of death preserves, after Christ, the same role played by the law after the coming of grace. It too is used to guard love and grace. The law – as it is written – was given for sinners (cf. 1Tm 1:9) and we are still sinners, that is to say subject to the lure of the world and of visible things, always tempted to ‘conform ourselves to this age’ (cf. **Rm** 12:2). There is no better vantage point to see the world, to see ourselves and all events, in their very truth, than that of death. Everything then takes its right place.

The world often appears as an inextricable bundle of injustice and chaos, to such an extent that everything seems to happen at random without there being any consistency or plan. A sort of shapeless painting, in which all the elements and colours seem to be placed randomly, just as in certain modern paintings. You often witness the triumph of iniquity while innocence is punished. However, to avert the belief that there is anything fixed and constant in the world, Bossuet observed that sometimes you see the opposite: innocence on the throne and injustice on the gallows!

Is there a vantage point from which to look at this huge picture and grasp its meaning? Yes, there is: it is the “end”, that is death, immediately followed by the judgment of God (cf. Hb 9:27). Seen from there, everything gets its right value. Death is the end of all differences and forms of injustice that exist amongst men. Death, as the Italian comedian Totò used to say, is like a ‘bubble level,’ capable of leveling out all privileges.

Looking at life from the vantage point of death is of extraordinary help to live well. Are you anguished by problems and difficulties? Walk ahead, set yourself in the right place: look at these things from your deathbed. How would you like to have behaved? How important would you hold these things to be? Have you got any issue with someone? Look at things from your deathbed. What would you like to have done then: to have won or to have accepted humiliation? To have prevailed or forgiven?

The thought of death prevents us from getting attached to things, or from setting our hearts on our earthly dwelling, forgetting that ‘we have no lasting city’ on earth (Hb 13:14). As a Psalm says, ‘at his death [a man] will not take along anything, his glory will not go down after him’ (Ps 49:18). In Antiquity, kings used to be buried with their jewels. This of course encouraged the practice of violating tombs to steal those treasures. Many such tombs have been found where, to keep violators away, an inscription on the tomb itself said: ‘There is only me here.’ That inscription was so true, even if, in fact, the tomb did hide those jewels! “At his death a man will not take along anything”.

**‘Keep watch!’**

Sister Death really is a good elder sister and a good teacher. It teaches us many things. if only we can listen gently. The Church is not afraid of sending us to her school. In the liturgy of Ash Wednesday there is an antiphon that sounds strong, even stronger in its original Latin words: *Emendemus in melius quae ignoranter peccavimus; ne subito praeoccupati die mortis, quaeramus spatium poenitentiae, et invenire non possimus.* ‘Should the day of death suddenly overtake us, let us amend what we have transgressed through ignorance, lest we seek the time of repentance and cannot find it’. One day, one sole hour, a good confession: how would these things look different at that time! How would we rather have those than a long life, full of riches and health!

I am also thinking of another context beyond the ascetic sphere in which we urgently need sister death as a teacher: evangelization. The thought of death is almost the only weapon left to shake drowsiness off our opulent society, experiencing exactly the same as the Israelites freed from Egypt: ‘So Jacob ate and was satisfied, Jeshurun grew fat and kicked...They forsook the God who made them and scorned the Rock of their salvation’ (Dt 32:15).

At a delicate point in the history of the “chosen people” God said to the prophet Isaiah: ‘Proclaim!’ ‘Proclaim!’. The prophet answered: ‘What shall I proclaim?’ and God said “All flesh is grass, and all their loyalty like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower wilts, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it”’ (Is 40: 6-7). I believe that God is giving the same instruction to his prophets today and he is doing so because he loves his children and does not want that ‘like a herd of sheep they will be put into Sheol, and death will shepherd them’ (cf. Ps 49:15).

The question about the meaning of death played a remarkable role in the early evangelization of Europe and we should not rule out that it may play a similar one in the current effort to re-evangelize it. There is indeed something that has not changed at all since then and it is precisely this: humans are to die. The Venerable Bede recounts how Christianity entered northern England, by overcoming the resistance of paganism. The king summoned the great assembly of his kingdom to decide on the issue whether to allow Christian missionaries in or not. There were opposing views on this, when one of his officials put it this way:

Human life on earth, o king, may be described as follows. Imagine it is winter. You are sitting at dinner with your dukes and your assistants. At the centre of the hall there is a fire heating up the room, while outside a storm of rain and snow is raging. A sparrow suddenly arrives at your palace; it comes in from an open window and very quickly leaves from the opposite side. Until it is inside, it is sheltered from the cold of winter, but a moment later, behold, it is cast back into the darkness it came from and it disappears out of sight. Our life is just like that! We do not know what comes before, or after, it. If this teaching can tell us something more certain on it, I think we should listen to it.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It was the question put by death itself that paved the way to the Good News, as an open wound in the human heart. A well**-**known psychologist has written against Freud that refusal of death, not sexual instinct, is at the root of every human action.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death**

In that way, we are not restoring the fear of death. Jesus came ‘to free those who, through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life’ (Hb 2:15). He came to free us from the fear of death, not to increase it. However, one needs to have experienced that fear to be freed from it. Jesus came to teach the fear of eternal death to those who knew none other than the fear of bodily death.

Eternal death! In the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse it is called ‘the second death’ (Rev 20:6). It is the only one that really deserves the name of death, because it is not a passage, the Pascal mystery of Easter, but a terrible terminal. It is to save men and women from this tragic destiny that we have to go back to preaching about death. No-one more than Francis of Assisi has ever known the new Paschal face of Christian death. His own death was really a Paschal transition, a “transitus”, as it is celebrated in the Franciscan liturgy. As he was feeling close to death, the Little Poor once cried out: ‘Welcome, my sister death!’[[10]](#footnote-10) Yet in his Canticle of the Sun or of the Creatures, along those very sweet words about death, he has some of the most frightening ones:

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death

From whom no living being can escape:

How dreadful for those who die in mortal sin!

How blessed are those she finds in your most holy will

For the second death can do them no harm.

How dreadful for those who die in mortal sin! ‘The sting of death is sin’, the Apostle says (1Cor 15:56). What gives death its most fearsome power of haunting a believing person and of frightening him or her is sin. If one lives in mortal sin, death still has its sting, its poison, just like before Christ, and therefore it wounds, kills and throws into the Gehenna. Do not be afraid – Jesus tells us – of the death that kills the body and then can do nothing more. Be afraid of the death which, after killing the body, has the power of throwing into the Gehenna (cf. Lk 12:4-5). Take sin away and you will also have taken its worst sting away from death!

With the institution of the Eucharist Jesus preempted his own death. We can do the same. In fact, Jesus invented this means to make us take part in his death, to unite us to himself. Taking part in the Eucharist is the most genuine, accurate and efficient way of ‘preparing’ for death, in St Alphonse de Liguori’s terms. In it we also celebrate our own death, and we offer it up, day by day, to the Father. In the Eucharist we can raise to the Father our ‘amen’, our ‘yes,’ to what awaits us, to the kind of death he will want to permit for us. In it we write “our will”: we decide to whom we want to leave our life, for whom we want to die.

We were born, it is true, to be able to die; death is not only the end, as in the conclusion, but also the end, as in the goal, of life. This, though, far from looking like a condemnation, as claimed by the above-mentioned philosopher, on the contrary appears to be a privilege. ‘Christ – as St Gregory of Nyssa put it - was born to be able to die’[[11]](#footnote-11), that is to be able to give his life as a ransom for all. We too have received life to have something unique, valuable, worthy of God, to be able to give him back in turn as a gift and as a sacrifice. What greater use can one think of making of life, than giving it, out of love, to the Creator who**,** out of love**,** gave it to us? Adapting the words of consecration uttered by the celebrant over the bread and wine at Mass we can say: ‘Through your goodness we have this our life to offer; we bring it to you. May it become a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you’ (cf. Rm 12:1).

With all this we have not taken away its sting from the thought of death and its capacity to anguish us that Jesus also wanted to experience in Gethsemane. We are at least more ready to accept the assurance that comes from faith and that we proclaim in the preface of the Mass for the dead:

For your faithful, Lord,  
life is changed not ended,  
and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust,  
an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.

God willing, we shall speak of this eternal dwelling in heaven**~~,~~** in the next meditation.

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Translated from Italian by Paolo Zanna.

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa OFMCap

“WE PROCLAIM TO YOU ETERNAL LIFE”

[1 Jn 1:2]

**Second Homily of Advent 2020**

“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God” (Is 40:1). It is with these words of Isaiah that the first reading of the Second Sunday of Advent began. They amount to an invitation, indeed a command, perpetually relevant, addressed to the pastors and preachers of the Church. Today we want to take to heart this invitation and meditate on the most consoling proclamation that faith in Christ offers us.

The second ‘eternal truth’ that the situation of the pandemic has brought back to the surface is the instability and transience of all things. Everything is transitory: wealth, good health, beauty, physical strength… It is something we are faced with all the time. To realize this one just has to compare any pictures of today – our own or those of any celebrities – with those of twenty or thirty years ago. Shocked by the pace of life we do not pay attention to this, we do not dwell on it to draw the necessary conclusions.

And lo and behold, all of a sudden, all that we took for granted has shown its fragile side, just as a pane of ice you are cheerfully skating on that suddenly breaks under your feet and you are plunged into chilly water. As the Holy Father said during that memorable “urbi et orbi” blessing on March 27th: ‘The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities.’[[12]](#footnote-12)

The worldwide crisis we are going through can be an opportunity to discover with relief that there is, despite anything else, a firm point, some solid ground, or rather a rock on which we can build our life on earth. The word for Easter - *Pesach* in Hebrew – means passage / transit and the Latin word for it is *transitus*. This word *per se* evokes something ‘passing’ and ‘transitory’, therefore something rather negative. Saint Augustine felt this difficulty and resolved it in an enlightening manner. He explained that living out the Easter experience does indeed mean passing / shifting, but ‘passing to what does not pass’; it means ‘passing from the world, in order not to pass together with the world.’[[13]](#footnote-13) Passing with your heart, before passing with your body!

What ‘never passes’ is, by definition, eternity. We have to rediscover faith in the afterlife. This is one of the contributions religions can make together to the effort to create a better and more fraternal world. It makes us understand that we are travelling together on our way to a common homeland, where there are no distinctions of race or nationality. We not only share the route, but also the destination. With very different concepts and contexts, this truth is common to all great religions, at least those that believe in a personal God. ‘Anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hb 11:6). This is how the Letter to the Hebrews sums up the common base - and the minimum common denominator - of every faith and every religion.

For Christians faith in everlasting life is not based on philosophical arguments about the immortality of the soul. It is based on a precise fact, that is the resurrection of Christ, and on his promise: ‘In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be’ (Jn 14:2-3). For us Christians everlasting life is not an abstract category, but rather a person. It means going to live with Jesus, ‘making one body’ with him, sharing the life of the Risen one in the fullness and joy of the life of the Trinity: “Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo”, as saint Paul said to his dear Philippians: “I long to depart this life and be with Christ’ (Phil 1:23).

**An eclipse of faith**

We may well wonder what has happened to the Christian truth of eternal life. In times such as ours, dominated by physics and cosmology, atheists express above all their denial of the existence of a creator of the world; in the 19th century they preferred to deny the afterlife. Hegel had claimed that ‘Christians waste in Heaven the energy meant for the earth.’[[14]](#footnote-14) Taking up this criticism, Feuerbach and above all Marx fought against the belief in a life after death, claiming that it alienates from earthly commitments. The idea of personal survival in God was replaced by a survival within the species and within future society. Little by little, the word ‘eternity’ was not only regarded with suspicion, but also forgotten and silenced.

Secularization has then brought this process to completion and done so to such an extent that it is even inconvenient to continue to speak about eternity amongst educated people, those who keep up with the times. Secularization is a complex phenomenon in its ambivalence. It can refer to the autonomy of earthly matters and to the separation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar, and in this sense not only is it not against the Gospel, but finds in it one of its deepest roots. On the other hand, the word secularization can also refer to a whole set of social attitudes that are hostile to religion and to faith. In this sense, it is preferable to use the word secularism. Secularism is in the same relation to secularization as scientism is to scientific precision and rationalism to rationality.

Even within such limits, the multi-faceted aspects of secularization appear in as many fields as theology, science, ethics, Biblical hermeneutics, expressions of culture and daily life. Its primeval meaning, though, is only one and it is clear. ‘Secularization,’ just like ‘secularism,’ stems from the word *saeculum* which in everyday language has ultimately come to refer to the present time – ‘the current eon,’ according to the Bible –, in opposition to eternity – the future eon, or ‘the *saeculum saeculorum*,’ ‘the time of times, everlasting life,’ as Scripture calls it. In this sense, secularism is a synonym of temporalism, that is a reduction of reality exclusively to its earthly dimension. Which means a radical fall of the horizon of eternity.

All of this has had a clear impact on the faith of believers. That very faith, on this point, has become shy and timid. When did we last hear someone preach on eternal life? The philosopher Kierkegaard was right: ‘The afterlife has turned into a joke, a need so uncertain that not only is it no longer respected, but not even considered. People are even amused by the thought that there was a time when this idea shaped the whole of life.’[[15]](#footnote-15) We keep saying in the Creed: ‘We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,’ but without really appreciating the importance of those words. The fall of the horizon of eternity has the same effect on Christian faith that sand has on a fire: it chokes it off.

What is the practical consequence of this eclipse of the idea of eternity? Saint Paul refers to the intention of those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead: ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (1Cor 15:32). When it is distorted, the natural desire to live *for ever* becomes a desire, or frenzy, to live *well*, that is pleasantly, even at the expense of others, if necessary. The entire earth becomes what Dante Alighieri said of Italy at his time: “the little threshing floor that so incites our savagery.’[[16]](#footnote-16) Once the horizon of eternity has fallen, human suffering appears doubly absurd and without remedy. The world looks like ‘a crumbling ant-heap’ and ‘a wave’s drawing on the seashore erased by the next wave.’

**Faith in eternity and evangelization**

Faith in eternal life is one of the conditions that make evangelization possible. As saint Paul the Apostle writes: ‘If Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. […] If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.’ (1Cor 15: 14 and 19). The proclamation of eternal life is the strength and the grit of Christian preaching. Let us look at what happened in the earliest Christian preaching. The oldest and most widespread idea in Greek and Roman paganism was that real life ended with death; thereafter there is only a life as larvae, in a world of shadows, without shape and colour. As he was approaching death, the Roman emperor Hadrian addressed to himself the well-known words in the epitaph on his tomb:

Little soul, gentle and drifting, guest and companion of my body, now you will dwell below in pallid places, stark and bare; there you will abandon your play of yore. But one moment still, let us gaze together on these familiar shores, on these objects which doubtless we shall not see again. [[17]](#footnote-17)

For a man who, in his lifetime, had had luxurious homes built for himself – just visit Villa Adriana in Tivoli to be sure -, such prospect was even more disheartening than for common folk. For his own tomb he erected the Mausoleum of Hadrian, present-day Castel Sant’Angelo, but he was perfectly aware that this would not change his fate of drifting towards ‘pallid places, stark and bare.’

On this backdrop, you understand the impact the Christian proclamation of a life after death infinitely richer than the earthly one, with no more tears, or death or anxiety, must have had (cf. Rev 21:4). You also understand why the subject and the symbols of eternal life – the palm tree, the peacock, the words “requies aeterna”, ‘eternal rest’ – are so frequent in the Christian burials in the catacombs.

In proclaiming eternal life not only can we leverage our faith, but also its affinity with the deepest yearning of the human heart. We are indeed ‘finite being capable of inifinity” (*ens finitum, capax infiniti*), mortal beings with a secret yearning for immortality. In a letter in reply to an Argentinian friend who reproached him for his apparent pride and presumption in wallowing in the problem of eternity, Miguel de Unamuno, who was by no means a champion of Christianity, wrote:

I am not saying we deserve an afterlife, nor that logic proves it for us; I am saying that we need it – whether we deserve it or not, and that’s all. I am saying that what is only transitory does not satisfy me, in my longing for eternity, and that without it I am indifferent to everything else and everything else makes no difference to me. I need it, I really do! Without it there is no more joy in life and life joys have nothing to tell me anymore. It is just too easy to say: ‘You just have to live and be content with life.’ And what about those who are not content?[[18]](#footnote-18)

And he himself added that it is not those who yearn for eternity that show that they despise the world and life on earth, but in fact it is those who do not: ‘I love life so much that losing it seems to me the worst of all evils. Those who enjoy life, day by day, and do not care to know whether they are going to lose it all or not do not really love it.’ Saint Augustine said much the same thing: ‘What is the advantage of living well if one is not to live for ever?’[[19]](#footnote-19) ‘Everything but eternity in the world is vain’, as one of our poets proclaimed[[20]](#footnote-20). To our contemporaries who nurture this need for eternity in the deep of their hearts, without perhaps daring to confess it even to themselves, we can repeat what Paul said to the Athenians: ‘What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you.’ (cf. At 17:23).

**Faith in eternity as a path to holiness**

We don’t need a renewed faith in eternity only to evangelize, that is to proclaim the Good News to other people; first of all, we need it to give ourselves new momentum on the path to holiness. Its first fruit is to make us free from any attachment to transient things, such as the increase of possessions and prestige.

Let us imagine this situation. A person receives an eviction letter and is asked to leave the house they live in quite soon. Fortunately, a good option for a new house comes up immediately. And what does that person do? They spend all their money to refurbish and redecorate the house they are to leave, instead of furnishing the one they are to move into! Wouldn’t that be silly? Well, we are also asked to “leave” this world and we look like that silly person if we only think about decorating our earthly home, without caring about doing good works which will follow us after our death.

As the concept of eternity fades away, this has an impact on believers, as it reduces their ability to face the suffering and trials of life with courage. We have to rediscover some of the faith of saint Bernard and saint Ignatius of Loyola. In any situation or faced with any obstacles, they would say to themselves: “Quid hoc ad aeternitatem?”, what is this compared to eternity?

Let us imagine a man holding scales: one of those called steelyard balances that you hold with only one hand and that have on one side a plate on which you put things to weigh and on the other a graded bar supporting the weight or measurement. If it falls, or the measurement is lost, all that you put on the plate lifts the bar and upsets the balance. Anything prevails, even a fistful of feathers.

We too are just like that, whenever we lose measurement of all that eternity is: our soul can be easily cast down by earthly things and suffering. Everything seems to be too heavy, too much for us to bear. Jesus said: “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire.’ (cf. Mt 18:8-9). Yet, having lost sight of eternity, we find it too much even to be asked to close our eyes before an immoral show, or to bear with a small cross in silence.

Saint Paul finds the courage to write: ‘For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal’ (2Cor 4:17-18). The weight of affliction is ‘light’ precisely because it is momentary, the weight of glory is ‘beyond all comparison’ precisely because it is eternal.

Many ask: ‘What will eternal life consist of and what will we do all the time in heaven?’ The answer is in those apophatic words of the Apostle: “Eye did not see, ear did not hear, and what God has prepared for those who love him never entered the heart of a man”. (cf. 1Cor 2: 9) If it is necessary to stammer something, we will say that we will live immersed in the shoreless and bottomless ocean of Trinitarian love. ‘But won't we be bored?’ Let us ask true lovers if they are bored at the height of their love and if they would rather not want that moment to last forever.

**Eternity: hope and presence**

Before closing, I want to clear up a doubt weighing on the belief in eternal life. For a believer eternity is not only a promise or a hope, as Carl Marx thought, seen as a way of pouring on heaven all our disappointments on earth. It is also presence and experience. In Christ ‘the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us’ — what we have seen and heard it and touched, says John (cf. 1Jn 1:1~3).

With Christ, the Word made flesh, “eternity has entered time”. [[21]](#footnote-21) We experience that every time we really put our trust in Christ, because those who believe in him already have eternal life (cf. 1Jn 5:13); every time we receive Communion, because in it ‘we have a pledge of future glory’; every time we listen to the words of the Gospel, which are ‘words of eternal life’ (cf. Jn 6:68). Saint Thomas Aquinas says that ‘grace is the beginning of [heavenly] glory.’[[22]](#footnote-22)

That presence of eternity in time is called the Holy Spirit. He is defined as ‘the first installment of our inheritance’ (Eph 1:14; 2Cor 5:5), and it has been given us so that, after receiving the first fruits, we yearn for fullness. “Christ – as saint Augustine writes – gave us the first installment of the Holy Spirit by which he, who could not deceive us anyway, wanted to make us certain of the fulfillment of his promise. What did he promise? He promised eternal life of which the Spirit that is given us is the first installment.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

Between the life of faith in time and eternal life there is a relationship which resembles that between the life of the embryo in the mother’s womb and that of the newborn baby. As the great Medieval Byzantine theologian Nicola Cabasilas wrote:

This world bears in its womb the new spiritual man, created according to God, until he is born to that perfect unperishable world, once he has been formed, fashioned and made perfect here. Just as an embryo, while he or she is in that dark and fluid existence, is prepared by nature to life in the light, the same happens to the saints […]. For an embryo, though, future life is absolutely future: the embryo is not reached by any ray, by anything pertaining to this life. It is not like that for us, since the future world has, as it were, been poured on and mixed with the present one […]. Thus, the saints are already allowed not only to set about and prepare for life, but to live and work in it.[[24]](#footnote-24)

There is a short story that illustrates this comparison between gestation and birth and I take the liberty of telling in all its simplicity.

There were two boy/girl twins who were so smart and early in their growth, that in their mother’s womb they would already talk to each other. The girl asked her little brother: ‘The way you see it, is there going to be life after birth?”. He replied: ‘Don’t be ridiculous! What makes you think there is anything outside this narrow dark space we are in?’. The girl, trying to be brave, said: ‘Who knows, perhaps there is a mother, someone in other words who has placed us here and who will take care of us.’ And he rebutted: ‘Do you happen to see a mother anywhere? All you see is all there is.’ She said again: ‘But can’t you sometimes feel a kind of pressure on your chest that grows day by day and pushes us forward?’ He replied: ‘Actually, if I pay more attention, it is true; I can feel it all the time.’ ‘You see – his little sister concluded triumphantly – this pain cannot be in vain. I think it is preparing us for something greater than this tiny space.’

The Church should be that baby who helps human beings to become aware of this yearning they have which remains unconfessed and sometimes is even ridiculed. It is also essential to deny the accusation giving rise to the modern suspicion against the notion of eternal life that the expectation of eternity distracts from the commitment to the planet and from the care of creation. Before modern societies took direct responsibility for promoting health and culture and for improving agricultural methods and people’s standards of living, who performed such tasks more and better than the monks who lived on their faith in eternal life?

Not many know that Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of the Sun or of the Creatures sprang from a sudden gasp of faith in eternal life. Franciscan sources describe the origins of the canticle as follows. One night, as Francis was particularly in pain for his many painful infirmities, he said in his heart: ‘Lord, come to my aid in my many infirmities, so that I may bear with them patiently!’. And immediately he heard these words in spirit: ‘Francis, tell me: if someone gave you a large precious treasure in return for your infirmities and suffering, would you not hold the earth and stones and waters as nothing compared to that treasure? Wouldn’t you be filled with joy?’. Francis answered: ‘Lord, that would be a great treasure without comparison, precious and lovely and desirable’. The voice ended: ‘Then, be happy and rejoice in your infirmities and troubles; from now on live happily, as if you were already in my Kingdom.’

On getting up the following morning, Francis said to his companions: ‘I am to rejoice greatly now amid my infirmities and pain, and always give thanks to God for the amazing grace and blessing that has been bestowed on me. Indeed, He deigned in his mercy to give myself, His little unworthy servant still living down here, the certainty of possessing His eternal Kingdom. Therefore, to His praise and to my consolation and for the upbuilding of our neighbor, I wish to compose a new ‘Lauda’, a poem in praise of the Lord for his creatures. Every day we enjoy God’s creatures and we cannot live without them. And every day we prove ungrateful for such great benefit, and we don’t give praise for it to our Creator as we should ". And he sat down, plunged in deep thought, and then he said: ‘*Altissimo, onnipotente, bon Segnore...*’ [Most high, all powerful, good Lord].[[25]](#footnote-25) The thought of eternal life had not inspired in him the contempt of this world and of creation, but an even greater enthusiasm and gratitude for them making the present pain easier to endure.

Today’s meditation on eternity certainly does not exempt us from experiencing with all other inhabitants of this planet how hard it is to bear with this trial we are going through; yet it should at least help us as believers not to be overwhelmed by it and to be able to pass our courage and hope on to those who do not have the comfort of faith. Let us end with a beautiful prayer from the liturgy:

O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. Through Christ our Lord. AMEN’[[26]](#footnote-26)

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Translated from Italian by Paolo Zanna

P. Raniero Cantalamessa OFMCap

‘HE MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US’

**Third Homily of Advent 2020**

“There is one among you whom you do not recognize". This is the sad cry of John the Baptist heard in the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Advent that we would like to let resonate in this last meeting before Christmas.

In his memorable Urbi et orbi message on March 27th in Saint Peter’s Square, after reading the Gospel about Jesus calming the storm, the Holy Father wandered what Jesus meant when he reproached his disciples for their ‘little faith’ and he explained:

They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” (Mk 4, 38). *Do you not care*: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: “Do you not care about me?” It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us.

We can glimpse another nuance in Jesus’ reproach, They had not understood who it was who was with them on the boat; they had not understood that, since he was on board, the boat could not sink because God cannot perish. We too, the disciples of our times, would make the same mistake as the apostles and would deserve the same reproach from Jesus if in the violent storm that has hit the world with the pandemic we were to forget that we are not alone on the boat at the mercy of the waves.

The feast of Christmas allows us to broaden the horizon: from the sea of Galilee to the whole world, from the apostles to us: ‘And the Word became fleshand made his dwelling among us’ (Jn 1:14). The Greek verb, in the aorist tense, *eskenosen* (literally, ‘he pitched his tent’), conveys the idea of an accomplished irreversible action. The Son of Man came down on earth and God cannot perish. A Christian is more entitled than the author of the Psalm to proclaim:

God is our refuge and our strength,

an ever-present help in distress.

Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken

and mountains quake to the depths of the sea,

Though its waters rage and foam

and mountains totter at its surging. (Ps 46:2-4).

‘God is with us,’ namely on man’s side, as a friend and an ally against the forces of evil. We need to rediscover the primeval and simple meaning of the incarnation of the Word, beyond all the theological explanations and dogmas built on it. God made his dwelling among us! He wanted to turn this event into his own name: Emmanuel, God-with-us. What Isaiah had prophesied: ‘the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.’ (Is 7:14) became accomplished fact.

As I said, we need to go back to the first of all the Christological controversies of the fifth century – before the Councils of Ephesus and of Chalcedon – to rediscover the paradox and the scandal contained in the claim: ‘The Word made his dwelling among us.’ It is worth reading the reaction of an educated second-century pagan, after learning about this claim by Christians. The philosopher Celsius was horrified and cried out: ‘Son of God – a man who lived just a few years ago?’ The eternal Logos - one who was around “yesterday or the day before yesterday”?’, a man who was ‘born of a poor spinner, in a village of Judea?’[[27]](#footnote-27) Quite understandable: the perfect union between divinity and humanity in the person of Christ was the greatest of all possible novelties, “the only new thing under the sun”, as St. John of Damascus defines it.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The first great battle that the faith in Christ had to face was not about his divinity, but about his humanity and about the truth of the incarnation. At the root of that refusal was Plato’s own dogma, stating that ‘no God ever mixes with man.’[[29]](#footnote-29) From personal experience St Augustine discovered that the ultimate root of the difficulty he felt in believing in the incarnation was a lack of humility. As he writes in his *Confessions*, ‘failing to be humble I could not understand God’s own humility.’[[30]](#footnote-30)

St Augustine’s experience can help us to understand the ultimate root of modern atheism and shows us the only possible way of overcoming it. The historical truth of the Gospel and the divinity of Christ have been attacked ever since the times of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, in the eighteenth century. Jesus said: ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (Jn 14:6). Once it was said that this only way to God was shut, it was easy to shift first to deism and then to atheism.

Augustine’s experience – as I said – points to the way of overcoming that obstacle, namely by giving up pride and accepting God’s own humility. ‘I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike’ (Mt 11:25): the entire history of human disbelief is explained by these words of Christ. Humility provides the key to understanding the incarnation. It takes little power to show off; on the other hand, it takes a lot of power to step aside and to efface yourself. God is this infinite power of self-effacement: ‘He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave … He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross’ (Phil 2:7-8).

God is love and hence humility! Love creates dependence on the person you love, and that kind of dependence does not humiliate but uplifts. The two claims ‘God is love’ and ‘God is humility’ are like two sides of the same coin. However, what does the word humility mean, if it is applied to God and in what sense can Jesus say: ‘learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.’ (Mt 11:29)? The key is that, in essence, humility is not about *‘being* little(one can be little and insignificant without being humble); nor is it about *considering* yourself little(that can depend on a negative self-image); or about *claiming* to be little(you can say that without actually believing it); rather, it is about *making* yourself littleand about doing that out of love, to let other people emerge. In that sense only God is truly humble. Indeed,

Who is like the Lord our God,

enthroned on high,

looking down on heaven and earth?

He raises the needy from the dust,

lifts the poor from the ash heap (Ps 113: 5-7).

Without much of an education, Francis of Assisi had got that. In his *Praises to God the Most High*, at some point he addresses God himself saying: ‘You are humility!” and in his *Letter to the whole Order* he cries out: ‘My brethren, look at God’s humility.’ As he writes in the first of his *Admonitions*: ‘He humbles himself, just as he did when he descended into the Virgin’s womb.’

Christmas is the feast of God’s humility. To celebrate it in spirit and in truth we need to become like children, as you need to lower your head to go through the little narrow door into the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

**“There is one among you whom you do not recognize!”**

Yet, let us go back to the heart of that mystery: ‘the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.’ God is with us for good, and that is irreversible. From now on that is the central focus of Christian prophecy. Zechariah greets the Precursor calling him ‘prophet of the Most High’ (Lk 1:76) and Jesus says of him that he is ‘more than a prophet’ (Mt 11:9). But in what sense is John the Baptist a prophet? Where does the element of prophecy lie in his case? The Old Testament prophets proclaimed a future salvation; John the Baptist does not proclaim a future salvation; rather, he points to one who is present there before him. The early prophets helped the people of Israel to cross the barrier of time; John the Baptist helps them to cross the even thicker barriers of what looks the opposite of what it is. Would the long-awaited Messiah – awaited by the patriarchs, proclaimed by the prophets, praised by the Psalms – then be that man who looks so humble and ordinary, about whom we know everything including the village he is from?

It is relatively easy to believe in something great and divine, if it is envisaged in an indefinite future: ‘in those days,’ ‘in the latter days,’ within a cosmic framework, with the heavens dripping sweetness and the earth opening and salvation budding forth (cf. Is 45:8). It is more difficult if you have to say: ‘Here he is! It’s him!’. It is so human to be tempted to say immediately afterwards: ‘Is that all?’. ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ (Jn 1:46); ‘we know where he is from’ (Jn 7:27).

That was a prophetic task beyond human limits and that is why the Precursor is defined as ‘more than a prophet.’ He is the one that points to a person and utters a decisive “*Ecce*! Here he is’. ‘Here is the Lamb of God!’ (Jn 1:29). Can you imagine what shiver must have run through the first people who received that revelation? The power of the Holy Spirit resounded in the words of the Precursor as he revealed that truth to well-disposed hearts. Past and future, a long wait and accomplishment converged and touched each other. The voltaic arc of the history of salvation was closed.

I believe that John the Baptist left us his very own prophetic task, which is to keep crying: ‘There is one among you whom you do not recognize!’ (Jn 1:26). He started the new prophecy. As I said, that prophecy is not about proclaiming a future salvation, but it is about revealing Christ’s presence in history: ‘I am with you always, until the end of the age’ (Mt 28:20). Christ is not present just because people continuously speak and write about him, but because he is risen and he lives according to the Spirit. It is not only an intention, but a reality. Evangelization starts there.

At the time of the Baptist, the main stumbling block was Jesus’s physical body, his flesh, which was so much like ours, except for sin. Nowadays the main stumbling block is his mystical body, the Church. The latter is so much like the rest of humanity, including sin as well! As the Precursor made it possible for his own contemporaries to recognize Christ in his humble flesh, so nowadays does he also need to be recognized in the poverty and misery of his Church and in the poverty and misery of our own lives.

**What Paul adds to John**

However, we need to add something to what we have said so far. It is not enough to be aware that *God was made man*, but we also need to know *what kind of man God was made*. I think it is significant to see how John and Paul differ and complement each other in the way each of them describes the incarnation. For John it consists in the fact that the Word who was God was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:1-14); for Paul, it consists in the fact that ‘Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a slave’ (cf. Phil 2:5ff.). For John, the Word, being God, was made man; for Paul ‘Christ…became poor although he was rich’ (cf. 2Cor:8-9).

The distinction between the *fact* of the incarnation and the *way* it was accomplished, between its ontological dimension and the existential one, concerns us because it sheds a special light on the current issue of poverty and on how Christian respond to it. It is helpful to provide a Biblical and theological foundation on the preferential choice for the poor, as proclaimed in the Second Vatican Council. As Jean Guitton, a layman who attended the Second Vatican Council as an observer, wrote: ‘The Council Fathers have rediscovered the sacrament of poverty, that is the presence of Christ under the species of those who suffer.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

The ‘sacrament’ of poverty! These are strong words, but they are well-founded. If indeed, by the *fact* of the incarnation, the Word has, in a certain way, taken upon himself every man (as some Greek fathers claimed), as for the *way* it was enacted, he took upon himself the poor, the humble, the suffering. The “institution” of this sign by Jesus matched his institution of the Eucharist. He who said on the bread: ‘This is my body’ used the same words about the poor as well. He did so when he was speaking about what people did – or failed to do – for those who were hungry, or thirsty, or in prison, or naked or strangers, by solemnly adding: ‘whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’ and ‘what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me’ (Mt 25:31ff.).

Let us draw the consequence of this at an ecclesiological level. Saint John XXIII, at the Second Vatican Council itself, coined the phrase ‘the Church of the poor.’[[32]](#footnote-32) Its meaning goes well beyond the usual interpretation. The Church of the poor does not consist only of the poor within the Church itself! In a certain sense, all the poor of the world belong to it, whether they are baptized or not. Some object: ‘How come? They have not received the faith or received Baptism!” That is true, but neither had the Holy Innocents whom we celebrate after Christmas. In God’s eyes, their poverty and suffering, if it is free from guilt, is their own baptism of blood. God has many more ways of saving than those we imagine, even though all these ways, without exception and ‘in a way that is known to God alone,’[[33]](#footnote-33) pass through Christ.

The poor belong ‘to Christ,’ not because they themselves claim to belong to him, but because he declared they belonged to himself, he declared them his own body. This does not mean that it is enough to be poor in this world to automatically enter God’s final kingdom. The words: ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father,’ (Mt 25:34) are addressed to those who took care of the poor, not necessarily to the poor themselves simply because they were materially poor in their lives.

Therefore, Christ’s own Church is far bigger than numbers and statistics say. This is not a platitude or a triumphalist statement, which would be inconvenient, especially in these times. No-one but Jesus has ever proclaimed: ‘whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’ (Mt 25:40), where ‘these least brothers’ are not only the people believing in Christ, but every human being.

Hence the Pope - along with every pastor in the Church - is truly the ‘father of the poor.’ We all rejoice and feel encouraged by seeing how seriously this role has been taken by recent Popes and especially by the pastor who is currently sitting on the chair of Peter. He is the strongest advocate of the poor in a world that is only familiar with selection and rejection. He has certainly not ‘forgotten the poor’! In Scripture we find a special blessing for those who are concerned for the poor:

Blessed the one concerned for the poor…  
 The Lord keeps and preserves him,  
 makes him blessed in the land,  
 and does not betray him to the enemies. (Ps 41:2-3).

In the Gospel we read of Mary and Joseph that ‘there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7). Nowadays, there is no room for the poor in the inn of the world, but history has shown on which side God was and on which side the Church is meant to be. To go to the poor is to imitate God's humility. It is making oneself small out of love, to raise those who are below.

But let's not delude ourselves: this is something that can be easier said than done. An ancient Father of the desert, Isaac of Nineveh, gave this advice to those forced by duty to speak of spiritual things to which they have not yet reached with life: "Speak of it as one who belongs to the class of disciples and not with authority, after having humiliated your soul and made yourself smaller than any of your listeners »[[34]](#footnote-34). And that's how I dared talk about it.

**‘We will come to him and make our dwelling with him’**

‘The Word was made flesh and made his dwelling among us.’ Before closing, we need to shift from the plural to the singular. The Word did not come into the world indistinctly, but personally into each believing soul. Jesus said: ‘Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him’ (Jn 14: 23). Christ, therefore, is not only present on the boat of the world or of the Church; it is present on the small boat of my life. What a thought! If only we could really believe in it! Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity discovered that the secret of her holiness lay there. As she wrote to a friend: ‘I seem to have found my own heaven on earth, because heaven is God and God is in my soul. The day I understood this, everything was filled with light.’[[35]](#footnote-35)

With the restrictions to public worship and to church attendance it has caused the pandemic may be an opportunity for many of us to discover that we do not meet God only by going to church, but that we can worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’ and converse with Jesus even locked in our homes, or even in our rooms. A Christians will never be able to do without the Eucharist and the community, but when this is prevented by force majeure, they should not think that Christian life is interrupted. If you have never met Christ in your heart before, you will never meet him - in the strong sense of this word – anywhere else.

There is a bold statement about Christmas that has bounced across times in the mouths of the great doctors and spiritual masters of the Church: Origen, saint Augustine, saint Bernard. Angelus Silesius and many more. Basically, it goes like this: ‘What use is that for me, that Christ was born of Mary once in Bethlehem, if he is not born of faith in my heart too?”[[36]](#footnote-36). ‘Where else is Christ born, in the deepest sense, other than in your heart and in your soul?’, as saint Ambrose wrote[[37]](#footnote-37). Saint Maximus the Confessor echoes that: ‘The Word of God wishes to repeat the my­stery of his incarnation in all men and women.’[[38]](#footnote-38) As you can see, it is a truly ecumenical truth.

Echoing the sametradition, St John XXIII, in his Christmas message of 1962, raised this burning prayer: ‘O Eternal Word of the Father, Son of God and of Mary, renew once again today, in the secret of our soul, the wondrous prodigy of your birth’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Let us make this prayer our own, but, in the dramatic situation we are experiencing, let us also add the burning plea of the Christmas liturgy: “ O King of the nations, the ruler they long for, the cornerstone uniting all people: Come and save us all, whom You formed out of clay.”.[[40]](#footnote-40) Come and raise mankind, exhausted by the long trial of the present pandemic!

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Translated from Italian, by Paolo Zanna

1. *Biblical quotations are taken from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Bible.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Homilies on the Gospel,* XVII. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Apofthegms of ms. Coislin* 126, n. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ib. II, c. 2, § 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. St Augustine, *Sermo Guelf.* 12, 3.. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Purgatorio,* XXXIII, 54 (Mandelbaum’s English translation, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Ecclesiastical History,* II,13. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. E. Becker, *Denial of Death*, New York: Free Press. 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Celano, *Vita secunda* , CLXIII, 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. St Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. cat.,* 32 (PG 45, 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\_20200327\_omelia-epidemia.html]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. St Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 55, 1 (CCL 36, pp. 463 s.). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften*, 1, in Gesammelte Werke, 1, Hamburg 1989, p. 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* 2nd part, chap. 4 . [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Paradiso, XXII, 151 (Allen Mandelbaum’s translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Marguerite Yourcenar’s translation in https://followinghadrian.com/2013/07/10/animula-vagula-blandula-hadrians-farewell-to-life. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Miguel de Unamuno, “Cartas inéditas de Miguel de Unamuno y Pedro Jiménez Ilundain”, edited by H. Benítez, *Revista de la Universidad de Buenos Aires* 3 (9/1949) 135.150. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. St Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 45, 2 (PL 35, 1720). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A. Fogazzaro, “A Sera” [At night], in *Le poesie* [Poems], Mondadori, Milano 1935, 194-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. St. Jean-Paul II in. in. http://www.vatican.va/jubilee\_2000/magazine/documents/ju\_mag\_01121997\_p-20\_en.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, II-II, q. 24, a. 3, ad 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. St Augustine, *Sermo* 378, 1 (PL 39, 1673). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. N. Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, I, 1-2 (PG 150, 496). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Legenda Perugina* 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Collect for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In Origen, *Against Celsus*, I,26.28; VI,10. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *De fide orthodoxa*, 45, [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Plato, *Symposium*, 203°; cf. Apuleius, *De deo Socratis,* 4: “Nullus deus miscetur hominibus”. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Confessions,* VII, 18.24). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. J. Guitton, cit. da R. Gil, *Presencia de los pobres en el concilio*, in “Proyección” 48, 1966, p.30. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In AAS 54, 1962, p. 682. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Gaudium et spes*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Isaac of Nineveh, *Ascetic Discourses* 4 , [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Letter 107 of 1902 to Countess De Sourdon. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cf. Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 22,3 (SCh 87, p. 302); Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubinic Wanderer*, I, 61: “Wird Christus tausendmal zu Bethlehem geborn / und nicht in dir: du bleibst noch ewiglich verlorn“. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. St Ambrose, *In Lucam,* 11,38. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. St Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* (PG 91,1084). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. <http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/messages/urbi_et_orbi/documents/hf_j-xxiii_mes_19621222_urbi-natale.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Antiphon to Evening Prayer of 22nd December. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)