

DEATH — WHERE IS NOW YOUR THORN
SONG 224

Dear Community

We are approaching inexorably the end of the church year.

Today is Memorial Day in Germany and next sunday our church year ends with the dead - or eternal sunday. All Saints Day of the Protestants.

It is no surprise, that texts are being read that deal with the end and whether we like it or not, there is now no way to avoid it: at the end of each life is death.

The death, the great fascination of humanity. Fascination, with this I mean that death is something that we can not really grasp, something that we do not want to acknowledge, something that because we can not understand it we are somehow afraid, uncertain.

In the fear of death, our deeply wounded pride is revealed, that we are not the lord of our situation, that we are final and have limits.

However, it cannot be that it goes on without me, you no longer need me, that it is now really over, that I am not anymore.

Certainly today, some people think that everything is over with death and it does not bother them.

The majority of the people are bothered by death. I claim this for now and remember the numerous stories, fairy tales and legends, images and movies in which death is the topic. Death is interestingly enough, mostly represented as a person. The reaper or the grim reaper.

Inseparably connected with death is the question: What happens next? What is it like after death?

Normally it is difficult for the human mind to recognize and accept limits and especially with this question: what happens next?, does one have to praise death as one of the most ingenious inventions of God? Yes, what then, will be next? Is there anything outside our human existence?

Yes, there is, it is called God. Yahweh, the father, who is worshipped and glorified with his son and the Holy Spirit.

I know, that not everyone thinks the same but I am allowed to say it because I believe in him, for me, this God is reality.

For people, who believe in God and listen to, read about and study the texts in the Bible, it is clear for them what happens after death comes: that great day, the day of the Lord, as we have heard today during the first reading.

There will be a day when the rule of God is restored.

Thus, the added suffering comes to an end.

It sounds so simple, almost a bit banal. Maybe its because in our lives, normally, it is not pushed so hard. It has to do with the wealth of misery that we face. It is the insight into the hopelessness of our human efforts to create comprehensive ever real peace.

But I already feel great longing for this day, when I see all the distress, when I can see it through the eyes of the affected.

No more war, no raped women in India, no humans on the run, no 47 dead Nigerian children because a suicide bomber blows up during the morning roll call. No slaved Chinese workers with 16 hour shifts. No starvation, no epidemic of Ebola, no cancer – everything over and done.

Like I said, maybe we are doing well, maybe we have become too „realistic“ - after all, it has been almost 2000 years since Christ's death – but there is a justified desire for many people on this earth to this day, the great day of the Lord.

A day that begins with our death.

Due to the pain or the fragility or any inconvenience that often precedes death, this is often forgotten but as it happens, the great day of the Lord for us starts with our death. Death does not wait. It stands outside of time.

To take one example, Paul knew this. In the Letter to Philipp (Phil 1, 23) he wrote, „I am torn apart: preferably I would like to leave this earthly life behind me and be with Christ: that would by far be the best“.

Here we hear the voice of a man who does not cling to life, who has a longing for perfection and assumes that he will be with Christ after his death. Will be, might not be.

There used to be a word for this, that today is totally out of style: certainty of salvation! Yes, this man was certain of salvation. He assumes that he will be with Christ after his death. This confidence can breathe a sigh of the soul.

Why is Paul so certain?

In his case, one has to say: because he believes in what he announced.

In his most theologically sophisticated work, Romans (Romans 3, 22/24) he wrote, „ there is a righteousness based on faith in Jesus Christ and that benefits everyone who believes. It does not make a difference if someone is a Jew or Gentile, because all have sinned and in their lives a God's glory is no longer expressed and that they be explained just based on his mercy. It is his free gift on the basis of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Sola fide und sola gratia. Only faith in Christ, and God's grace. But thats it dear congregation, that is it and that's enough!

Many of you know this London bus advertisement, which when I think of I always associate with death. There it is called, „There`s probably no God, so stop worrying.“

Apparently it is in the nature of people to worry about death, but we christians should oppose the yet full conviction> „I'm not worrying. There is a God, but I've got Jesus.

Certainty of Salvation.

Jesus Christ overcame death. Our names are listed in the book of life.

Why do we have to be alert and sober and ready to fight, just like we heard in the second reading?

This question, dear Congregation, coupled with the question, „ why the day of the Lord so suddenly lit up like a flash. (Lk 17, 24) must come or will, almost made me throw away the towel before this sermon.

If we are justified from grace, and this grace can give us serenity, certainty, yes certainty of salvation, why does it need to be alert?

Why does the day of the Lord come, „as a thief in the night?“ (1.Thess 5, 2)?

At this point I have to admit, that I can only share with you the current state of my thoughts. There are hard questions, and I am not sure whether I have correctly and completely understood the background. I can, however, imagine something about each point.

On the issue of vigilance:

I firmly believe that I am saved by grace and faith. But it is not cheap grace. Jesus gave his life for it. Faith, like love, is not objects which one can put in their pocket. Faith must be lived, love demonstrated of the people and turn to God. Faith that is not lived is not available, it is dead.

The vigilance is therefore necessary so that I can stay on the path of succession or return on to this way.

On the issue of armament:

The breastplate of faith and love as well as the helmet of hope are not offensive weapons.

You protect me. In a scientifically-dominated society, these tanks and this helmet protect me

from the claims of scientific evidence: prove to me, that your God exists. Can you measure God and make it comprehensible? As before, people demand a sign, and today, just like before: God is not provable, it is experienced. God cannot be pressed into the narrowness of our logic and into our mind.

To the last question, the question of suddenness:

Here I think that the text from the first reading that we already heard, the one from the Gospel of Luke, brings a little light in this matter. It is the power of the factual. It will be easy. Not God will surprise the people, but people will simply be surprised. As it happens, not every person responds to God's love offering.

At some point and maybe even death itself, this participation by the people simply stops. And as I said before, with death we are reach the big day, the day of the Lord.

Then it may be that I will receive only the fair wage for my actions.

If it will be like this, thank God, I can not say but there are hints about this in the Scripture that it might be so.

The focal point to all of these issues, to all aspects of our life and death is the belief, is faith. Faith comforts us, even when we are tempted to despair because of the suffering in the world. God's big day is coming. The Lord will wipe away the tears and bring true peace.

It is faith that constantly reminds us, that we are God's children and that God will fairly judge. Even if we are far from understanding the thoughts of God, this is how faith works, that we trust God.

In the face of death, faith makes us truly confident and good cheer, „I'm not worrying. There is a God and I have Jesus!“

Amen.