

PREPARATION FOR DEATH

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Translated from the Italian of

ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI

*BISHOP OF SAINT AGATHA OF THE GOTHES, AND FOUNDER OF
THE CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER*

**REVISED BY
REV. ORBY SHIPLEY, M.A.**

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

n the tranquil embrace of the eighteenth century, amidst the ever-changing currents of human history, there emerged a luminous figure whose life and teachings continue to resonate with profound wisdom and devotion even today. This monumental five book set you now hold is a tribute to the enduring legacy of a man who remains an exemplar of piety, scholarship, and spiritual insight—Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

Born on September 27, 1696, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, during his earthly sojourn, achieved remarkable heights that would shape the course of Catholic theology and spirituality for generations to come. His sanctity and theological acumen were recognized by the Church when he was declared Venerable on May 4, 1796, followed by his beatification in 1816, and ultimate canonization in 1839. In 1871, his intellectual contributions were further acknowledged when he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.

July 30, a date etched in the hearts of the faithful, marks the feast day of this Doctor of the Church. Saint Alphonsus Liguori earned the sobriquet “The Prince of Moral Theologians” for his profound insights into moral theology, a body of work that has served as a guiding light for countless souls seeking ethical and spiritual clarity.

This five book set showcases the richness and depth of Saint Alphonsus’s theological and spiritual writings. His literary

output, spanning over one hundred books, is a testament to his dedication to sharing the treasures of the Catholic Faith with the world. Through these pages, readers will have the privilege of delving into the profound wisdom of a man whose teachings have touched hearts and transformed lives for centuries.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori's singular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary earned him the title of the "Marian Doctor of the Church." His works, such as *The Glories of Mary*, are a resplendent tribute to the Mother of God, illuminating her role in the Christian faith and her maternal intercession for all believers.

In addition to his theological contributions, Saint Alphonsus Liguori founded the Redemptorist Order, a spiritual family dedicated to imitating Christ's mission of proclaiming redemption to the most abandoned. His devotion to the Eucharist, explored in *The Holy Eucharist*, underscores the central importance of the Blessed Sacrament in the life of the Church and the believer.


This set also includes Saint Alphonsus's reflections on the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, birth, and infancy of Jesus Christ, and *Preparation for Death*, addressing crucial aspects of Christian faith and the human experience.

As we embark on this literary journey through the works of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, may we be inspired by his unwavering faith, intellectual brilliance, and his deep love for Christ and His Church. May these volumes serve as a beacon of light, guiding readers towards a deeper understanding of their faith, a closer relationship with God, and a more profound appreciation of the saintly legacy of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

In the spirit of the saint himself, may these pages inspire us all to live lives of holiness, virtue, and unwavering devotion to Our Lord and His Mother, Mary.

—Conor Gallagher
CEO and Publisher of TAN Books

PREFACE

he object of the present Treatise is expressed by a passage which is to be met with in one of the Epistles of S. Fulgentius, on the subject of prayer: "*Compunction of soul* excites an *affection* for prayer; humble *prayer* obtains the Divine help. *Compunction of soul*, leads it to regard its wounds; but prayer, earnestly demands the medicine for its healing. And who is sufficient for these things? For who can pray as he ought, unless the Divine Physician Himself pours into the heart the beginning of spiritual desire."

It will be seen that the following Manual of Devotion consists of a series of chapters or instructions upon important points of Christian teaching, which are called "Considerations." These Considerations are written for the purpose of pricking or of wounding the conscience, it may be in many points, that so it may be thoroughly aroused and awakened; of exciting, that is, *compunction of the soul*, real remorse of conscience for past as well as for present coldness and dryness. It must be a very hard heart, indeed, which is not moved by these "Considerations," so touchingly simple are they, so plain, and so wholly true. They deal with such doctrines and facts as have an universal application, which admit of no dispute, and which are always confirmed by some passage from Holy Scripture. It must be allowed, on all hands, that it is

necessary for the soul to be aroused to feel its own needs, to regard its own wounds, that so it may be directed to a source whence these needs can be supplied, and these wounds be healed. One great aim of this Treatise, is to arouse, as well as to direct the mind, to lead it to consider its own wants, and to seek by prayer to have those wants supplied. The book is essentially a guide to prayer. It represents, from its beginning to its end, the continual outpouring of heart before God; an outpouring that is oftentimes expressed in the very same words which imply, at the same time, a new phase of thought. These several repetitions are not to be regarded as tokens of intellectual inferiority, but as so many developments of a plan, which is both carefully laid down and accurately carried out under a seeming carelessness of expression.

Regarded as a Manual of Mental Prayer, each of these "Considerations" has a technical and special signification. They treat of life and death, of the value of time, of the mercy of God, of the habit of sin, of the general and particular judgments, of the love of God, of the Holy Communion, and of kindred subjects equally important. The "Consideration," as here used, implies far more than a mere inquiry. Its equivalents, the Italian *Considerazione*, and the Latin *Consideratio*, do not fully express its particular meaning in this Treatise, where it stands for a reflectional meditation. It calls into play the exercise of the memory, which puts together all the circumstances of the subject under notice; it excites the imagination, which represents, as in a picture, all such circumstances, bringing them vividly before the mind's eye; and, lastly, it urges the will so to fix and detain these things in the soul, that, by its own effort, it may unite itself with the will of God, so that God's will and the will of man may become one.

S. Thomas Aquinas defines Consideration to be “an act of the intellect, and of the beholding the truth of a proposition,” (Sum. 22^E, Q. liii. 4); to be, moreover, principally related to the judgment. As one of the three divisions of prayer, properly so called, these Considerations must also be considered as reflections, as reasonings of the mind upon definite subjects, either for its perfect conviction of some vital truth, or for its persuasion to the formation of some holy resolution. The chief end of all such reflection, must be the bringing the soul into communion with God; but this cannot be effected by the intellect alone. Man is not united to God through the mind only, but chiefly through the heart; the “*Consideration*” must pass onwards into an “*Affection*,” which forms another leading division of mental prayer; where the action of the former ends, that of the latter begins.

Let us apply these “Considerations” to one or two of the subjects which are treated of in the present Treatise.

At the first thought of *Death*, we are all naturally inclined to fear it, but the “Consideration” upon death (c. viii.) tends to remove this fear, since it brings death before us, Firstly, as “the end of our labours;” of that toil by which we are prepared for our eternal rest. Secondly, as the “consummation of our victory” over sin and weakness; the struggle has been a sore one; the battle has been hardly fought, but it has been won at last. Thirdly, as the “gate of life;” therefore the death of the Saints is called a birthday, a day in which they are born to that other and blessed life which can never end. These are the three “*Points*” in the “Consideration” upon Death which disarms it of its terrors.

Again, are we sorely troubled by our struggles with self-will? We find a “Consideration” on conformity to the will

of God (c. xxxiv.), the “First Point” of which indicates the connection between perfect resignation to God’s will and perfect love towards His Person. The “Second Point” shows that nothing comes amiss of earthly sorrow and humiliation, not even martyrdom itself, if all things be submitted to His Divine will. The “Third Point” explains that peace of soul which fills a heart whose every desire is in conformity to God’s will. Let come what may, I wish for it, “because God wills it.”

Perhaps, with its cares and pleasures, the world is occupying too large a portion of our time and thoughts. The “Consideration” upon its vanity (c. xiii.) will teach us, in the *first* place, to care chiefly for those things which we can carry away with us after death, to endeavour to gain eternal possessions. In the *second* place, to weigh the things of time against those of eternity, and to mark their lightness. In the *third* place, to contrast time with eternity, and so to become “rich toward God.” Each Consideration opens up three *points* for meditation, and to each of these is added an “Affection” and a “Prayer.”

The “Considerations” employ the mind, the “Affections” excite the heart; they awake in us those emotions by which it seeks to unite itself with God. It is that *affectus orationis* of which S. Fulgentius makes mention. The affection is kindled by consideration, and the consideration is supplemented by the affection; neither can afford to be separated the one from the other. Whilst the “Consideration” sets forth death as the end of toil, the “Affection” urges the soul to anticipate it, to ask heaven of Jesus, not that it may enjoy itself the more, but that it may love Him the more. The former bids us look at the consummation of our victory, the latter expresses such love,

that it longs quickly to die, if such be the will of Jesus. Better far to die, and so to be delivered from the danger of losing grace, and from the fear of love ever growing cold.

The "Affections" to the three points of the Consideration upon the will of God lament over the times when God's will was not followed. They desire from henceforth that His will shall reign perfectly in the heart. And lastly, they express an earnest cleaving to Him who laid down His will for our sakes. "I give thee my will, my liberty, my all." With Affections our author has joined "Prayers." It would have been more conformable to the ordinary divisions of prayer had he substituted "*Resoluzioni*" for the "*Pregchiere*;" for, indeed, as is but natural, the "*affection*" in the present book passes into a "*resolution*;" the prayer is more of a resolve than a petition. It is generally a firm resolve which is made in prayer either to renounce some things for God's glory, or to perform or suffer other things for the same end. The "spiritual desire," "*spiritalis desiderium*," of S. Fulgentius expresses itself in the form of spiritual resolution.

This brief explanation of the plan upon which this book has been written, naturally leads to some suggestions as to its use.

And, firstly, it may be remarked, that only one Consideration should be read at the same time. In many cases one point even, with its "Affections and Prayers," will afford sufficient employment both for the head and heart. It must be remembered that the book is intended to be suggestive merely, not final or ample. It presents a skeleton which the devout reader is to clothe with flesh and blood, and animate with the life of his own spirit. It is an outline, the details of the picture being left to the reader to complete.

Secondly, it will be found most profitable, after having fixed the "Consideration" upon which the meditation is to be made, to read, first of all, its title, and the initial text of Holy Scripture, and for the reader to try to form a meditation for himself; after which he can compare his own thoughts with those of the book, noting carefully in what they agree, in what they differ, and how far they mutually minister to each other.

Thirdly, it must be remembered, that the Treatise is but a means to an end, and that end is gained, when the attention is arrested, and the heart is moved. Let the book be then closed, and let a certain time of quiet be given to the mind, during which it may do its sufficient work in the soul.

It is, moreover, believed that this book may be made of no small value to many as a help for the preparation of sermons. Its fulness of application of Holy Scripture is very great, and many of its quotations from the Fathers are both striking and apposite; and many a parish Priest, with but small time for reading at his disposal, may often find in one point only of a Consideration the hint and outline of a whole sermon.

Take, for instance, the first point of Consideration xiv. It is reducible to the following heads:—I. General considerations. 1. The moral inequalities in the government of this world, and the need which these imply for another life. 2. This earth is not man's country; his earthly home is but an inn. 3. The folly of those who spend their substance in buying possessions in a land which is not theirs. II. The heavenly home for the faithful. 1. Beauties of heaven. 2. In it is the fulness of desire. 3. It is an ocean of delight, and an existence of continual joy. 4. Its enduring nature. III. The dreadful home of the lost. 1. It will be a place of straitness and confinement. 2. A place of destitution, forsaken by all, forsaken by God. 3. A home of

your own choice. 4. A state of endless pain. But several of the points are richer in material than the one to which reference has been made.

With regard to the translation, it is sufficient to observe that the Italian is rendered into as literal English as the differences of idiom between the two languages would admit. In some cases it may be feared that the English has been made to give way somewhat too much—an error on the safe side; so uncertain and unsatisfactory is a loose paraphrastic style of translation. A few omissions are made. Two Considerations are rejected as unsuitable for our present use. The repetition of the same anecdote is avoided. A few irrelevant miracles or stories do not appear. Occasionally a reading from the Apocryphal has been replaced by one from the Canonical Scriptures. And in all things, that *spiritual edification* which was the one object of the author in writing this book, has not been lost sight of in the preparation of this English edition. But while acknowledging gladly, how useful the present and kindred books are for this end, it is well ever to remember the statement of that same Saint whose words have formed the beginning and text of these remarks. “Ædificatio spiritualis, nunquam oportunius petitur, quam ab ipso Christi Corpore (quod est Ecclesia) in Sacramento Panis et Calicis Ipsum Christi Corpus et Sanguis offertur.” (S. Fulg. De Miss S. Spt., c. xi.)

All Saints, a.d. 1868.

CONSIDERATION I
DESCRIPTION OF ONE WHO
HAS DEPARTED THIS LIFE

“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

—Gen. iii. 19

FIRST POINT



Consider that thou art dust, and unto dust thou must return. The day will come when thou must die, and be placed in a grave where “the worms” shall “cover thee.” (Isa. xiv. 11.) The same fate awaits all, both nobles and plebeians, both princes and vassals. Directly the soul shall leave the body, with the last gasp, it will go into eternity, and the body will return to its dust. “When Thou takest away their breath they die, and are turned again to their dust.” (Ps. civ. 29.)

Imagine to yourself a person, whose soul has just departed. Behold that pale corpse, which is still upon the bed, the head fallen upon the breast; the hair dishevelled and bathed in the sweat of death; the eyes sunken; the cheeks hollow; the face of ashy paleness; the tongue and the lips of a leaden hue; the body cold and heavy. Those who see it grow pale and tremble. How many there are who, upon seeing a relation or friend in this condition, have changed their life, and have left the

world! But still more dreadful is it when the body begins to decay. A few hours or days will hardly have passed ere it will become offensive. The windows will have to be opened; incense will have to be burned—nay, it must be sent in haste to the church to be buried, that the whole house be not infected. Behold to what that proud, that voluptuous man is reduced? In life he was the favourite, the one who was sought after in society; now he makes all those who look upon him shudder. His relations hasten to have him removed from the house, and men are hired to bear him, shut up in a coffin, to his grave. He was once famous for his great talent—for his great politeness—for his courteous behaviour, and for his facetiousness; but now that he is dead, his memory will soon pass away, “their memorial is perished with them.” (Ps. ix. 6.)

Upon hearing the news of his death, some people say he was of great dignity—others, that he left his family well-provided for; some grieve because he had done them good, and others rejoice because they derive some benefit from his death. Within a short time, however, he is spoken of by no one. And his nearest relations, even from the hour of his death, will not hear him mentioned, lest their grief should be renewed. When the visits of condolence are made, other things form the subject of conversation; and if any one by chance alludes to the departed one, the relations immediately exclaim, “In kindness, do not mention him to me.”

You must consider that what you have done at the death of your friends and relations, others will do at your death. Those who are living, enter upon the stage of life, to occupy the wealth and the position of the dead, and little or no esteem is paid to the dead, and very little mention is ever made of them. Your relations will at first mourn for you for some days, but

they will soon be consoled with that share of property which will fall to them, so that they will shortly rejoice because of your death, and in the same room in which your soul has gone forth, to be judged by Jesus Christ, they will dance and eat, laugh and play, as they did before; and your soul, where will it be then?

Affections and Prayers

O Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee that Thou didst not let me die when I was in disgrace with Thee. During how many of the past years have I not deserved to be cast into hell? If I had died on such a day, or on such a night, what would have become of me for all eternity? I thank Thee for this, O my God. I accept my death as a satisfaction for my sins; and I accept it in whatever manner it may please Thee to send it to me. But since Thou hast waited for me until now, wait for me yet a little longer. "Let me alone, that I may take comfort a little." (Job x. 20.) Give me time to weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee, before Thou comest to judge me.

I will no longer resist Thy sweet voice that calls me. Perhaps these words which I have just read may be the last call for me. I confess that I do not deserve pity, for Thou hast so often pardoned me; and I, ungrateful one that I am, have again offended Thee; but "a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise." (Ps. li. 17.) O Lord, since Thou wilt not despise a broken and contrite heart, look upon a traitor, who being repentant, flees unto Thee. "Cast me not away from Thy presence." (Ps. li. 11.) In mercy, do not cast me from Thee, for Thou hast said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (S. John vi. 37.) It is true that I have offended Thee more than many others, because I have been favoured

by Thee with light and grace; but the blood which Thou hast shed for me gives me courage, and gives me pardon, if only I repent. Yes, O my Sovereign Good, I do repent with my whole heart for having despised Thee. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee for the time to come. I have offended Thee too many times already. I will not spend the life that remains to me, O my Jesus, in giving Thee offence, but I will spend it ever weeping over the displeasure I have caused Thee, and in loving Thee with all my heart, Thou, O God, who art so worthy of infinite love.

SECOND POINT

In order more clearly to see what indeed thou art, my Christian soul, S. John Chrysostom observes, "Go to a sepulchre, contemplate dust, ashes, worms, and sigh." See how that corpse becomes at first yellow, and then black. Afterwards there is seen upon the body a white and unpleasant mould. Then there issues forth a foul and corrupt matter, which sinks into the ground. In that corruption many worms are generated, which feed upon the flesh. The rats then come to feast upon the body, some on the outside, others entering into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall in pieces; the ribs are the first to become bare of flesh, then the arms and the legs. The worms after having consumed the flesh eat each other, and, in the end, nothing remains of that body but a fetid skeleton, which, in course of time, is divided, the bones being separated, and the head falling from the body: they "become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, and the wind carried them away." (Dan. ii. 35.) Behold, then,

what man is—a little dust upon a threshing-floor, which is carried away by the wind.

Behold that nobleman, who was considered to be the life and soul of society, where is he? Go into his room, he is not there; if you look into his bed, it belongs to another; his clothes, his arms, others have already taken and divided them. If you wish to see him, you must seek for him in that grave where he is changed into all that is unpleasant, and into fleshless bones. O my God, that that body fed with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, attended by so many servants, should be reduced to this! O ye saints, ye, who for the love of that God whom ye loved alone, upon this earth, knew how to mortify your bodies;—and now your bones are kept and prized as sacred relics in golden shrines; and your souls which are beatified, rejoice in the presence of God, waiting for the final Day, when your bodies even, will again become the companions of your souls in glory, as they were once the companions of your souls, in bearing the cross of this world. This is the true love of the body, so to burden it with mortifications here, that it may be happy in eternity; and to deny it those pleasures here which would render it unhappy in eternity.

Affections and Prayers

Behold, therefore, O my God, to what my body will become reduced, through which I have so often offended Thee, it will be reduced even to worms and corruption. But this does not grieve me, O my God, nay, it rather cheers me, for this my flesh to become putrid and consumed, which made me lose Thee, O my Sovereign Good. But it does grieve me very

much, to think that I should have taken so much delight in those wretched pleasures which have so often displeased Thee. But I will not distrust Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me to give me pardon. "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you." (Isa. xxx. 18.) And Thou wilt pardon me if I repent. Yes, Thou wilt, for I do repent with all my heart for having despised Thee, O God of infinite goodness. I will repeat to Thee as did S. Catherine of Genoa, "No more sins, O my Jesus, no more sins." No, I will no longer abuse Thy patience; neither will I wait to embrace Thee until the hour of death. O my Crucified Love, now will I embrace Thee, now will I commend my soul into Thy keeping. "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." My soul has been many years in this world without loving Thee; give me light and strength to love Thee during the life that remains to me. I will not wait until the hour of death to love Thee; from this moment, I will love Thee, and embrace Thee, and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never more to leave Thee.

THIRD POINT

My brother, in this description of death, thou seest thyself, and that, which one day thou wilt be, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Reflect, for in a few years, nay, perhaps in a few months, and even days, thou wilt become a mass of corruption and worms. By thinking upon this, Job became a saint, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father, to the worm, Thou art my brother and sister." (Job xvii. 14.)

Everything must have an end; and if, when the hour of death arrives, thy soul is lost, everything will be lost for thee. S. Lawrence Justinian says, "Consider thyself as dead already,

since thou knowest thou must die. If now the hour of thy death were approaching, what is there of good, that thou wouldst not like to have done? Now, that thou art living, reflect, that one day thou must die. Bonaventure observes, that in order to guide the vessel aright, the pilot must place himself at the helm: even so must a man, if he wishes to lead a holy life, reflect that death is ever nigh. Therefore, S. Bernard observes, "Look upon the sins of youth, and blush; look on the sins of manhood, and weep; look upon the present evil habits of thy life, and tremble, and hasten to make amends."

When Camillus de Lellis beheld the graves of the dead, he said within himself, "If all these dead bodies could come back again to life, what would they not do to gain eternal life? and I, who have now the opportunity—what am I doing for my soul?" Yet it was humility on the part of this saint which caused him to say this. But perhaps, my brother, thou mightst with reason fear, lest thou shouldst be like that barren fig-tree, concerning which our blessed Lord said, "Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none." (S. Luke xiii. 7.) Thou, who for many more years than three hast been living in this world, what fruit hast thou yielded? Take care, remarks S. Bernard, for the Lord does not require flowers only, but seeks for fruit also; that is to say, not only good desires and resolutions, but also good works. Therefore, take care to make good use of the time which God in His mercy grants to you; do not wait until "time shall be no longer" to desire to do good—when it shall be said unto you: "Time shall be no longer, depart." Make haste, it is now almost time to leave the world; make haste, what is done, is done.

Affections and Prayers

Look upon me, O my God, for I am that tree which for so many years deserved to hear these words, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" (S. Luke xiii. 7;) yes, because during the many years that I have been in the world, I have yielded no other fruit than the briars and thorns of sin. But Thou, O Lord, dost not wish me to despair. Thou hast said to all those that seek Thee, that they shall find Thee. "Seek and ye shall find." I do seek Thee, my God, and I do desire Thy grace. I am indeed sorry for all the sins I have committed against Thee. I would grieve even to death because of them. During the past years, I have often fled from Thee; but now I value Thy friendship more than all the kingdoms of the world. I will no longer resist Thy calls. Thou dost wish me to be Thine alone. I yield myself wholly to Thee, without any reserve. Thou didst give Thyself entirely for me, upon the Cross; now I give myself entirely to Thee.

Thou hast said: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." (S. John xiv. 14.) My Jesus, I trust in this Thy great promise, and in Thy name; and through Thy merits I seek of Thee Thy grace and Thy holy love. Let Thy grace and Thy most holy love abound in my soul, where sin did once abound. I thank Thee greatly, for having given me the Spirit to make this prayer to Thee. Whilst Thou dost inspire me to pray, it is a sign that Thou wilt graciously hear me. Hear me, O my Jesus, and give me a great love towards Thee, and give me a great desire to please Thee, and then the strength to follow the desire.

CONSIDERATION 2

ALL ENDS WITH DEATH

“An end, the end is come.”

—Ezek. vii. 2

FIRST POINT

By the worldly, those only are considered happy who enjoy the things of this world, its pleasures, its riches, its pomps; but death puts an end to all these joys of earth, “For what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time.” (S. James iv. 14.) The vapours which arise from the earth, sometimes when raised in the air and clothed with the light of the sun, cause a beautiful appearance; but how long does it last? It vanishes with a little wind. Behold that great man, who to-day is courted, feared, and almost adored; to-morrow, when he is dead, he will be despised, reviled, and scorned. When death comes, all must be left. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas à Kempis, boasted of having made a beautiful house; but a friend told him one day that there was one great defect. What is it? he demanded. “The defect,” replied the other, “is, that you have had a door made in it.” “Indeed!” exclaimed he; “is the door a defect?” “Yes,” replied the friend, “because one day you will

have to be carried out of that door dead, and thus will you have to leave your house and all that is in it."

Death, in short, despoils man of all the things in this world. What a sad sight it is to see a prince carried forth from his palace, never more to enter it, and to see others take possession of his furniture, his money, and of all his other goods! He is left in the grave with a garment on that will scarcely cover his body. There is no one now to prize and to flatter him; neither are there any who take account of his last commands. Saladin, who acquired many kingdoms in Asia, when dying, said, that when his body was taken to be buried, a man should go before it, with his shirt suspended to a pole, crying, "This is all that Saladin carries to the grave."

When the body of that prince is shut up in the grave, the flesh will soon fall off, and his skeleton will no longer be distinguished from other skeletons. S. Basil cries, "Contemplate the sepulchre, and see whether you can distinguish who was the servant and who was the lord."

Diogenes was one day observed by Alexander the Great to be anxiously seeking for something amidst certain skulls. "What dost thou seek?" inquired Alexander, with curiosity. "I am seeking," he replied, "the skull of thy father, King Philip, and I cannot distinguish it; if thou canst find it, show it to me." In this world, men are born of unequal rank, but after death all will be equal, observes Seneca. And Horace said, that death makes the spade equal to the sceptre.

Finally, when death comes, "the end comes;" everything is ended, and everything must be left, and nothing is taken to the grave, of all the things of this world.

Affections and Prayers

Since, my dear Lord, Thou dost grant me understanding to know, that all that the world esteems, is but vanity and foolishness, give me strength to leave all its allurements before death may come to snatch me from them. Alas! wretched me, how often, because of the miserable pleasures and possessions of this world, have I not offended, and lost Thee. O Thou Infinite Good, O my Jesus, O my Heavenly Physician, look upon my poor miserable soul, and upon the heavy wounds I have made with my sins, and do Thou have mercy upon me. "If Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." I know Thou wilt make me clean; but in order to cleanse me, Thou desirest that I should repent of all the injuries I have done Thee. I do indeed repent of them with my whole heart; heal me, therefore, now that Thou canst do so. "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." (Ps. xli. 4.) I have often been forgetful of Thee, but Thou hast never been forgetful of me; and now make me feel that Thou wilt also forget those offences which I have committed against Thee, if only I abhor them. "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed. . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die." (Ezek. xviii. 21.) I do, indeed, detest them, and hate them above every other evil. Forget Thou, O my Redeemer, the sins I have committed against Thee. In future, I would rather lose all, even life itself, than Thy grace. And of what use are all the world's treasures to me without Thy grace?

Ah, help me! for Thou knowest how weak I am. Satan will never cease to tempt me; he is now preparing to assault me, in order to make me his slave once more. No, my Jesus, I know Thou wilt not abandon me. I wish to be the slave of Thy love from this day forth. Thou alone art my Lord; Thou

hast created me, Thou hast redeemed me, Thou hast loved me beyond all others; Thou alone deservest to be loved; Thee only will I love.

SECOND POINT

Philip II., King of Spain, being near death, called his son to him, and casting aside his royal robe, and showing him his breast, which was all gnawed by worms, said to him, "Prince, see how we die, and see how all the grandeur of this world is finished." Theodoret spoke truly when he said, that "death fears neither riches nor guards, nor the purple; rottenness follows, and health fails." So that every one who dies, although he may be a prince, takes nothing with him to the grave; all the glory remains upon the bed where he died. "For he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth: neither shall his pomp follow him." (Ps. xlix. 17.)

S. Antoninus relates, that when Alexander the Great was dead, a certain philosopher, exclaiming, said, "Behold he who was treading upon the earth yesterday, now by that same earth is possessed. Yesterday, the whole earth was not enough for him, now, he lies in about seven spans thereof. Yesterday, he conducted his armies over the earth, and now he is taken by a few men to be put under the earth." But rather let us listen to God, when He says: "Why is earth and ashes proud?" (Ecclus. x. 9.) Man, dost thou not see, that thou art nothing but dust and ashes; and of what, therefore, art thou proud? Why, therefore, dost thou spend thy years, and thy thoughts, in seeking to make thyself great in this world? Death will soon come, and then all thy grandeur will come to an end, and also all thy designs. "And then all his thoughts perish." (Ps. cxlvi. 3.)

Oh how much happier was the death of S. Paul the hermit, who lived sixty years shut up in a cave, than the death of Nero, who was emperor of Rome? How much happier was the death of Felix, a Capuchin lay brother, than the death of Henry VIII., who lived in royal splendour, but who was the enemy of God? But we must consider, that these holy men, in order to die such a happy death, gave up everything—their country, the hopes and pleasures which the world offered them; and they embraced a life which was poor and despised. They buried their lives in this world, so that they might not be buried when dead, in hell. But how can the worldly, who are living in sin—in worldly pleasure, in dangerous occasions—how can they, I repeat, hope to die a happy death? God now threatens those who are living in sin, that when they are on the bed of death they will seek Him, but they will not find Him. “Ye shall seek me and shall not find me.” (S. John vii. 34.) God says, that that will be the time for vengeance, but not for mercy. “To me belongeth vengeance and recompence.” (Deut. xxxii. 35.) Reason tells us the same; for at the hour of death, a worldly man will find his mind fail him; his heart dark and hardened, because of his evil habits; his temptations will be very strong; how can he, who in life has been wont to yield to sin and to let sin conquer him—how can such an one, I say, ever expect to be able to resist temptation at the hour of death? An all-powerful Divine grace is then needed to change his heart; but will God give him this Divine grace? Has he deserved it, during the unholy life he has led? And does he deserve it now, that he is dying? And yet this is a question concerning his eternal happiness or his eternal misery. How is it then that he who thinks upon this, and believes in the truths of faith, does not give up everything,

so as to give himself entirely to God, who, according to our works, so will He judge us?

Affections and Prayers

Ah, Lord, how many nights have I, wretched one that I am, laid me down to sleep at enmity with Thee? O God, what a wretched state was my soul then in! It was hated by Thee, and it did not mind Thy hatred. Once I was condemned to hell, the sentence only remained to be executed. But Thou, my God, hast never ceased to seek me, and to invite me to pardon. But who is it who can assure me that I am pardoned now? Must I live, my Jesus, in this fear until the time shall come for me to be judged? But the grief that I feel at having offended Thee; the desire which I have to love Thee; and much more, Thy great compassion, my loved Redeemer; make me hope to remain in Thy blessed favour. I am very sorry for having offended Thee, O Thou Sovereign Good, and I love Thee beyond all things. I have resolved to lose all rather than lose Thy grace and Thy holy love. Thou desirest that heart which seeks Thee to rejoice. "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." (1 Chron. xvi. 10.) O Lord, I detest my offences against Thee; give me courage and confidence; do not reproach me with my ingratitude, for I am very conscious of it; I detest it. Thou hast said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) Yes, my God, I will leave all and be converted to Thee. I seek Thee; I desire Thee; and I love Thee more than all things. Give me Thy holy love, and I ask for nothing more.

THIRD POINT

David likened the happiness of this present life to a dream, when one awakens. “Yea even like as a dream, when one awaketh.” (Ps. lxxiii. 19.) A certain author observes, “In a dream the senses being at rest, great things appear, and are not, and quickly vanish away.” The goods of this world appear great, but in truth they are nothing; like sleep, they last but a short time, and then they all vanish away. This thought—namely, that all things end with death—made S. Francis Borgia give himself up entirely to God. This saint was obliged to accompany the body of the Empress Isabella to Granada. When the coffin was opened, all those present fled, because of the dreadful sight and smell; but S. Francis, led by Divine light, remained to contemplate, in that body, the vanity of the world; and looking upon it, he said, “Art thou then my empress? Art thou that great one to whom so many great ones bowed the knee? O my mistress, Isabella, where is now thy majesty and thy beauty?” “Even thus,” he concluded within himself, “do the grandeurs and the crowns of this world end. From this day forward I will therefore serve a Master Who can never die!” Therefore, from that time he gave himself entirely to the love of Jesus crucified; and then he formed this resolution, that if his wife should die he would become a religious, which resolution he afterwards fulfilled by entering the Society of Jesus.

Truly, then, did one disabused of the world write these words on a skull: *Cogitanti vilescent omnia*. It is impossible for him who thinks upon death to love the world, and therefore are there so many unhappy lovers of this world; because they do not think upon death. “O ye sons of men, how long will ye blaspheme mine honour: and have such pleasure in

vanity, and seek after leasing?" (Ps. iv. 2.) O miserable children of Adam, the Holy Spirit warns us; why therefore do you not drive away from your hearts that affection for the world which causes you to love vanity and deceit? That which happened to your forefathers will one day happen to you; they, at one time were living in the same houses, and many slept upon the same beds that you do now; but now they are no more: the same will happen to you.

Therefore, my brother, give thyself now to God, before death shall come to Thee. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." (Eccles. ix. 10.) Whatsoever thou canst do to-day do it, and wait not until to-morrow, because this day will pass away, and will never return, and to-morrow death might overtake you, so that you would then be able to do nothing at all. Quickly remove yourself from all that separates, or that may separate you from God. Let us now give up all our love for this world's goods, before death takes them away from us by force. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." (Rev. xiv. 13.) Blessed are those, who, when dying, are found dead to the affection of this world. By such as these, death is not feared—it is desired, it is joyfully embraced; for instead of separating them from all that they love, it then unites them to their Sovereign Good, Who is alone loved by them, and Who will make them blessed for evermore.

Affections and Prayers

My dear Redeemer, I indeed thank Thee for having waited for me. What would have become of me if I had died when I was far from Thee? For ever blessed be Thy mercy, and Thy patience, which Thou hast exercised towards me, during the many years that are past. I thank Thee for the light and grace

with which Thou dost now assist me. At one time I did not love Thee, and then I cared little for being loved by Thee. Now I love Thee with all my heart, and now I have no greater grief, than what I feel, for having once displeased a God so gracious. This grief torments me, but the torment is sweet, because this grief gives me confidence that Thou hast indeed pardoned me. My sweet Saviour, would that I had died over and over again, rather than once even, to have given Thee offence. I tremble and fear, lest at any time I should ever again displease Thee. Ah, rather let me die a most painful death, than that I should ever again lose Thy grace. Once I was the slave of hell, but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul. Thou hast said that Thou wilt love those who love Thee. I love them that love me. I do love Thee, therefore Thou art mine, and I am Thine. I might lose Thee at some time, but this is the grace that I seek, namely, that it would be better for me to die, than to lose Thee again. Thou hast given me so many graces that I have not asked Thee for, therefore I cannot fear that Thou wilt fail to grant me this grace, for which I am now asking Thee. Never again let me lose Thee; give me Thy holy love, and nothing more can I desire.