

A LIFE WITHOUT REGRETS

Yes, we all know from experience that the life of a disciple of Christ includes the cross. But, Jesus also promises us a life of greater freedom as well – freedom from sin, freedom from compulsion, freedom from the burdens, trials and wounds that come with choices in conflict with God’s plan for our lives. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). The best preparation, therefore, for death and for a full life without regrets is a holy and virtuous life. But what if my life hasn’t been all smooth sailing in accordance with Gospel values? What if, as death approaches, I look back on my life and see several habits or relationships that were actually quite messy? What can be done about our regrets? best preparation for death is a righteous and virtuous life. But what if things are messier? What if, as death approaches, a person realizes his or her life hasn’t been all that put-together? What can be done about our regrets?

In the Gospel of Saint Luke, Jesus promises one person in particular that he will be saved. That man, surprisingly enough, is the good thief. Seeing Jesus willingly embrace His suffering and death transformed the good thief (traditionally called St. Dismas). In his final hours, he sought the mercy of God. He begged Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:39). Moved with compassion, Jesus promises him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). St. Dismas shows us, that no matter where we are in our lives or what mistakes we have made, conversion is always possible.

It is with this understanding of God’s infinite mercy that we are able to better appreciate the Church’s teaching on purgatory. The cleansing nature of purgatory puts right the unfinished business of our lives. Despite our many faults and misdeeds, a final decision for God can grant us entrance into this process of purification thereby making us ready for the splendors of heaven.

THE FIVE REGRETS OF THE DYING

For many years I worked in palliative care. My patients were those who had gone home to die. Some incredibly special times were shared. I was with them for the last three to twelve weeks of their lives... When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again.

Here are the five most common:

1. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled.

2. I wish I didn’t work so hard.

All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

3. I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.

Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming.

Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result.

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying.

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

When you are on your deathbed, what others think of you is a long way from your mind. How wonderful to be able to let go and smile again, long before you are dying.

Bronnie Ware
The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing.
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MEMENTO MORI

Memento mori is a Latin phrase meaning “Remember that you must die.” It reminds us both of our mortality and of the judgment that will follow our death. Some religious orders, like the Capuchins or Carthusians, used this phrase (along with sometimes gruesome art!) as a reminder to tirelessly and zealously seek the good of their souls. For us “Memento mori” can be motivation to continue to invest ourselves in the things that truly matter.

AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH

THE FINAL MOMENTS OF EARTHLY LIFE

- » Tell your family members and friends (in advance) that you would like to be visited by a priest. Father can offer the sacraments of the Eucharist (Viaticum or the Last Communion), Anointing of the Sick and Confession.
- » Ask to pray with your assembled family and friends.
- » Request to hold sacred objects like a rosary or crucifix—these can help lift the mind to God.
- » Invite someone to read from Holy Scripture. The Last Supper discourses from the Gospel of John (John, Chapters 14-16) or the Passion Narrative (Matthew 27, Luke 23 or Mark 15) unite the dying in a special way to Christ.
- » Pray the Rosary.
- » Offer prayers thanking God for the many benefits he has offered, or perhaps more appropriately, uniting your sufferings with Jesus's suffering on the cross.
- » Ask a priest to celebrate Mass to obtain the graces of a holy death.
- » Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

*“Into your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, LORD, God of truth.”*

Psalm 31:6

The Last Judgment (Detail), Andrei Rublev (1408)



Some things can be taken care of well before death. Making known your wishes now can be a tremendous consolation to your loved ones.

Consider the following:

- Have you settled your earthly affairs (eg. your debts and estate)?
- Do you have any troubled relationships you would like to rectify?
- Have you appointed a healthcare proxy and discussed with him or her ethical courses of action to take as you near death?
- Would you like Masses to be offered for the welfare of your soul?
- How and where would you like to be laid to rest?
- Would you like the Rosary said at your Vigil or your wake?
- Do you have any preferences for your funeral Mass?

*“Farewell, but not forever! Brother dear,
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.”*

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman
The Dream of Gerontius



During the Month of November, a time when the Church remembers in a particular way those who have gone before us in death, these inserts are made available with the aim of presenting anew Catholic beliefs on the sacred goal of life: attaining the Kingdom of Heaven.

www.adw.org/care-for-the-dying