

November is a time when we think about death. That is not a bad thing. The death of Jesus was followed by the resurrection. We believe that just as Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring us back from death to share in the joys of everlasting life. We are wise to be vigilant for the second coming of Jesus. But we would be foolish to think we know the hour or the day when that will happen. The judgment of God alone will eliminate the sinful. Until then, we must be patient and repentant.

So, let us ponder a little bit on death. People prepare for death by drawing up a will. If you are preparing for some major surgery, the hospital asks who can make health decisions for you if needed. These are all prudent things to do, but they do not focus on insuring there is enough oil on hand for when the hour of our death comes.

- On a daily basis, there are three things we can do to think about death.
  - Pray the Hail Mary. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” It is good to work on our relationships now so that when the time of our death comes everything is in order.
  - Pray the Our Father. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Do we have anyone that we need to reconcile with? Have we stopped talking to someone or held onto a grudge? By praying the Our Father daily and reflecting on the gravity of its words, we can work on our relationship with God and with others.
  - Pray as you prepare to turn in for the night. “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Guard me Jesus, through the night, and wake me with the morning light.” Praying as we go to sleep may also entail examining the day and looking at how we did ... responding to others with love or failing in some way and asking God for the grace to do better. We know that Joseph was troubled by the pregnancy of Mary. The Angel of the Lord came to him in a dream and helped him to understand. Inviting God into our hearts before we fall asleep may also help us with the concerns that trouble us.
- On a seasonal basis we may also think about death.
  - At the end of May we celebrate Memorial Day. This week we celebrate Veteran’s Day. We are thankful for the sacrifices that the military have made that we may live in freedom. Perhaps we will set some time aside to honor the fallen and reach out to the living who still bear the scars of war.
  - In Advent and in Lent, we listen to the readings that call us to prepare for Christmas and Easter. They often call us to repentance. If you are blessed to live near a church where a priest is available, take advantage of confession whenever you can.
- On an annual basis, we might prepare for our own death. Pope John Paul II worked on his Last Will and Testament<sup>1</sup> on a recurring basis not from the standpoint of leaving property to someone else but from the standpoint of taking stock of where he was at with God.
  - March 6<sup>th</sup> 1979, he had been pope for less than 6 months. “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” (Mt 24:42) - these words remind me of the last call, which will happen at the moment the Lord wishes. I desire to follow Him, and I desire that everything making up part of my earthly life should prepare me for this moment. I do not know when the moment will come, but like everything else, I place it too in the hands of the Mother of my Master: Totus Tuus. In the same maternal Hands I leave everything and everyone

with whom my life and vocation have linked me. In these Hands I leave, above all, the Church, as well as my Nation and all humanity. I thank everyone. Of everyone I ask forgiveness. I also ask for prayer, that the Mercy of God may appear greater than my weakness and unworthiness.

- A year later the pope added to his will with these words: Today I wish to add only this: that each of us must bear in mind the prospect of death. And must be ready to present himself before the Lord and Judge - Who is at the same time Redeemer and Father. I too continually take this into consideration, entrusting that decisive moment to the Mother of Christ and of the Church - to the Mother of my hope.
- And still later, he thought about how close he came to death one day: On May 13, 1981, the day of the attack on the Pope during the general audience in St. Peter's Square, Divine Providence saved me in a miraculous way from death. The One Who is the Only Lord of life and death Himself prolonged my life, in a certain way. He gave it to me again. From that moment it belonged to Him even more ... I ask him to call me back when He Himself wishes. "In life and in death we belong to the Lord ... we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8). I also hope that, as long as I am called to fulfill the Petrine service in the Church, the Mercy of God will give me the necessary strength for this service.

We are all equal in the eyes of God. None of us is the pope, but each of us can follow the lead of the late great John Paul II. Put your thoughts down on paper about life here and now ... and life in the world to come. Put a little oil in the lamp tonight and let the Wisdom of God help you to write your spiritual will and testament.

Amidst the pandemic, perhaps we are each thinking of death a little more often. 84 souls and counting in Alaska, 236,000 in America, 1,240,000 deaths across the world. With the thought of death in mind, we should never lose sight of God's love and mercy. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thes 4:14).

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<sup>i</sup> [npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4583808](http://npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4583808)