



Boston Catholic Journal

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"... and at the Hour of Our Death ..."



Maria ... *in Medio Umbrae Mortis*

They will come together, for we have prayed it a thousand times, and neither can be turned away.

Death will come. Perhaps for one loved it has already come. But so has Mary! Mary, fulfilling her promise ... *praying for us ... in medio umbrae mortis*, in the midst of the hour of that shadow of death ... *our name* upon her holy lips!

We instinctively know, even if we had never been told, had never witnessed the scandal, the loss, and the corruption of death --- that we are called to pass through that valley of deep shadow, through cypress-whispered lies on a wind to the west that subdues even the sun in the vastness of night. All speaks of an end. But it is a lie.

How many times in our lives has God called us --- and the way to Him was a pass, a pass deep in shadow through the menacing valley of towering fear ... a valley haunted by the shadows of our sins, the specters of our crimes --- long ago absolved by God but which we bear in a justice ill-conceived and still-born because it understood nothing of love, and not knowing love, knew nothing of forgiveness and the absolution of absolute justice! What is more, darker things, things ancient and of malice inhabit that valley with towering walls of despair, a valley unfathomably deep in pain and dark with suffering.

Death is not the only dark corridor.

"Semel Sepultus Bis Mortuus"

These words are engraved on the tomb of Duns Scotus, the great medieval Franciscan theologian and philosopher. They mean, "Buried once. Died twice." Simply put, we must die before we die. It seems paradoxical, but for any life lived in Christ, it is well understood. We must, and in so many ways, die to ourselves, to our own wills, our inclinations, our desires, our pride, our arrogance ... all that would carry us off to the "Second death" ... that final death in which none utterly perish and from which none ever return. This is the death from which all sane men flee. St. John beheld it from afar in the Apocalypse. Christ spoke of it to Apostles.

What we must come to understand is that each of these "valleys" cause us to die to ourselves in some way. They truly are an experience of walking through a valley, over which the shadow of death in one form or another has fallen. More often than not, we are seized with fear, we cannot see the way ahead, we deem ourselves alone, abandoned and forgotten. The way grows narrow, and one by one all our pretensions fall aside, our defenses crumble, and in the gathering darkness we are left with two options only: faith or despair ... we tremble in either and are blind in both.

We have reached the end of all *things*. If we have chosen faith, faith in God, ... the darkness becomes sacred. Despair, that doorway to death, is broken by a blinding shaft of holy light. The Holy Spirit Himself calls us to place our trust and confidence in the Christ Who conquered death, even... *even* as, in our humanity, we see no solution or answer to our problem or pain.

This is the a "Dark Night of the Soul", the path of pure faith ... a time, a place, in which we cannot find words, in which we are become speechless, enfolded in silence sanctified through suffering. We collapse to our knees before the mercy, goodness, and absolute certainty of God. Who has chosen us, we have chosen in turn.

In every valley, in every darkness ... in every death, we hear the whispered prayer for which we have longed all our lives each time we have cried out, "Pray for us, now and at the hour of our death!" The culmination of that prayer of St. and sinner, of sinner become St., will it go unanswered *in medio umbrae mortis?*

In your perplexity, vulnerability and uncertainty call upon Mary; she will unfailingly lead you onwards to living waters. There she will cause you to lie down and bring you comfort and solace. A parched nomad prostrate in a desert night, fall into her gentle arms – and she will pour on your lips and into your heart the very Living Water of Life. Mary is the true shepherdess of your soul and it is her task to bring you safely unto the Shepherd.

Ite ad Mariam! Go to Mary.



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