



Boston Catholic Journal



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DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

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WHEN TOMORROW NEVER CAME MORS STUPEBIT (DEATH HAS STRUCK)



“Vidi impium superexaltatum, et elevatum sicut cedros Libani; et transivi, et ecce non erat; et quaesivi eum, et non est inventus locus ejus.” (Psalm 36.35-36)

“I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon. And I passed by, and lo, he was not: and I sought him and his place was not found.”

You have already heard that sonorous sound *as of a distant trumpet.* It is

indistinct, distant, and carries a somber note that every man who has ever lived has heard. For some it is an ominous bray, immeasurably deep, tremulous and harsh, muted only by the depths of earth through which it breaks in subtle fissures leaving graves quivering in anticipation.

It strikes the lowest chords in the human heart and is ancient beyond the sum of all years.

You do not hear it with your ears but with the deepest listening in your being. It somehow resembles the final muttering of thunder in a vast distance that reverberates through the earth. It is a call, you realize, of something to come.

It resonates in the darkest chambers of your soul. It is primeval. Instantly you understand it as a prophetic summons.

It percolates through every language of man and is comprehensible to all: It is alternately a prophesy, a promise, a hope, or a threat, and all are unmistakably certain: “*You will die.*”

Have you begun vainly reflecting upon your “mark in the world” — how “the world will remember you” — *in that tomorrow that, one day, will not come for you?* Such vanity! Why would it matter — and within three generations, to whom? You esteem yourself far more than you should.

Most of us — the *vast majority* of us — are not momentous figures in the annals of history, and even were we, we would never know, being dead. What is more, the world will end, and with it, all remembrance of the famous and the infamous ... and of us. It is of no significance *to be remembered by the world* after we are dead — *but it is of the greatest significance to be known by God*, and to never hear those terrible words that will be uttered by Christ to many, sorrowfully, in the Last Judgment: “*I never knew you: depart from Me*” (Saint Matthew 7.22).

The very ancient Sequence *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) which was sung for centuries in the Requiem Mass, or Mass for the Dead (*Missa pro defunctis*) describes this judgment succinctly in the fourth and sixth stanzas:

Mors stupebit et natura,

Cum resurget creatura,

Iudicanti responsura.

Death is struck, and nature quaking,

All creation is awaking,

To its Judge an answer making.

Judex ergo cum sedebit

Quidquid latet apparebit:

Nil inultum remanebit.

When the Judge His seat attains

And each hidden deed arraigns

Nothing unavenged remains.

What, then, will you say? What answer will you give?

It is worth reflecting upon — while yet we can.

Editor

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