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Death's Duel

John Donne





Death's Duel

Author(s): Donne, John (1572-1631)

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Description: This sermon, the last one Donne gave, was later described as his own funeral sermon. It portrays life as a slow descent into sickness and death, yet points towards the hope of redemption, salvation, and resurrection. As Donne battled illness towards his life's end, death remained a constant theme of both his pastoral and poetic works, including his classic Holy Sonnet X, "Death Be Not Proud." While some, such as Samuel Johnson and John Dryden, have criticized Donne's work for being dry and passionless, Donne consistently wrote and spoke on matters deeply personal to him. In this sermon, at least, the then dying Donne's passion is clearly evident.

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DEATH'S DUEL

[PSALM LXVIII. 20](#), in fine.

And unto God the Lord belong the issues of death (i.e. from death).

BUILDINGS stand by the benefit of their foundations that sustain and support them, and of their buttresses that comprehend and embrace them, and of their contignations that knit and unite them. The foundations suffer them not to sink, the buttresses suffer them not to swerve, and the contignation and knitting suffers them not to cleave. The body of our building is in the former part of this verse. It is this: *He that is our God is the God of salvation; ad salutes*, of salvations in the plural, so it is in the original; the God that gives us spiritual and temporal salvation too. But of this building, the foundation, the buttresses, the contignations, are in this part of the verse which constitutes our text, and in the three divers acceptations of the words amongst our expositors: *Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death*, for, first, the foundation of this building (that our God is the God of all salvation) is laid in this, that *unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death*; that is, it is in his power to give us an issue and deliverance, even then when we are brought to the jaws and teeth of death, and to the lips of that whirlpool, the grave. And so in this acceptance, this *exitus mortis*, this issue of death is *liberatio á morte*, a deliverance from death, and this is the most obvious and most ordinary acceptance of these words, and that upon which our translation lays hold, the *issues from death*. And then, secondly, the buttresses that comprehend and settle this building, that he that is our God is the God of all salvation, are thus raised; *unto God the Lord belong the issues of death*, that is, the disposition and manner of our death; what kind of issue and transmigration we shall have out of this world, whether prepared or sudden, whether violent or natural, whether in our perfect senses or shaken and disordered by sickness, there is no condemnation to be argued out of that, no judgment to be made upon that, for, howsoever they die, *precious in his sight is the death of his saints*, and with him are the issues of death; the ways of our departing out of this life are in his hands. And so in this sense of the words, this *exitus mortis*, the issues of death, is *liberatio in morte*, a deliverance in death; not that God will deliver us from dying, but that he will have a care of us in the hour of death, of what kind soever our passage be. And in this sense and acceptance of the words, the natural frame and contexture doth well and pregnantly administer unto us. And then, lastly, the contignation and knitting of this building, that he that is our God is the God of all salvations, consists in this, *Unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death*; that is, that this God the Lord having united and knit both natures in one, and being God, having also come into this world in our flesh, he could have no other means to save us, he could have no other issue out of this world, nor return to his former glory, but by death. And so in this sense, this *exitus mortis*, this issue of death, is *liberatio per mortem*, a deliver-

ance by death, by the death of this God, our Lord Christ Jesus. And this is Saint Augustine's acceptance of the words, and those many and great persons that have adhered to him. In all these three lines, then, we shall look upon these words, first, as the God of power, the Almighty Father rescues his servants from the jaws of death; and then as the God of mercy, the glorious Son rescued us by taking upon himself this issue of death; and then, between these two, as the God of comfort, the Holy Ghost rescues us from all discomfort by his blessed impressions beforehand, that what manner of death soever be ordained for us, yet this *exitus mortis* shall be *introitus in vitam*, our issue in death shall be an entrance into everlasting life. And these three considerations: our deliverance *à morte, in morte, per mortem*, from death, in death, and by death, will abundantly do all the offices of the foundations, of the buttresses, of the contignation, of this our building; that he that is our God is the God of all salvation, because *unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death*.

First, then, we consider this *exitus mortis* to be *liberatio à morte*, that with *God the Lord are the issues of death*; and therefore in all our death, and deadly calamities of this life, we may justly hope of a good issue from him. In all our periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death; our very birth and entrance into this life is *exitus à morte*, an issue from death, for in our mother's womb we are dead, so as that we do not know we live, not so much as we do in our sleep, neither is there any grave so close or so putrid a prison, as the womb would be unto us if we stayed in it beyond our time, or died there before our time. In the grave the worms do not kill us; we breed, and feed, and then kill those worms which we ourselves produced. In the womb the dead child kills the mother that conceived it, and is a murderer, nay, a parricide, even after it is dead. And if we be not dead so in the womb, so as that being dead we kill her that gave us our first life, our life of vegetation, yet we are dead so as David's idols are dead. In the womb we have *eyes and see not, ears and hear not*. There in the womb we are fitted for works of darkness, all the while deprived of light; and there in the womb we are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though we be never born. Of our very making in the womb, David says, *I am wonderfully and fearfully made, and such knowledge is too excellent for me*,¹ for even that is *the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes*;² *ipse fecit nos, it is he that made us, and not we ourselves*,³ nor our parents neither. *Thy hands have made and fashioned me round about*, saith Job, and (as the original word is) *thou hast taken pains about me, and yet* (says he) *thou dost destroy me*. Though I be the masterpiece of the greatest master (man is so), yet if thou do no more for me, if thou leave me where thou madest me, destruction will follow. The womb, which should be the house of life, becomes death itself if God leave

1 [Psalm 139:6](#).

2 [Psalm 118:23](#)

3 [Psalm 100:3](#).

us there. That which God threatens so often, the shutting of a womb, is not so heavy nor so discomfortable a curse in the first as in the latter shutting, nor in the shutting of barrenness as in the shutting of weakness, when *children are come to the birth, and no strength to bring forth.*⁴

It is the exaltation of misery to fall from a near hope of happiness. And in that vehement imprecation, the prophet expresses the highest of God's anger, *Give them, O Lord, what wilt thou give them? give them a miscarrying womb.* Therefore as soon as we are men (that is, inanimated, quickened in the womb), though we cannot ourselves, our parents have to say in our behalf, *Wretched man that he is, who shall deliver him from this body of death?*⁵ if there be no deliverer. It must be he that said to Jeremiah, *Before I formed thee I knew thee, and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee.* We are not sure that there was no kind of ship nor boat to fish in, nor to pass by, till God prescribed Noah that absolute form of the ark.⁶ That word which the Holy Ghost, by Moses, useth for the ark, is common to all kind of boats, *thebah*; and is the same word that Moses useth for the boat that he was exposed in, that his mother laid him in an ark of bulrushes. But we are sure that Eve had no midwife when she was delivered of Cain, therefore she might well say, *Possedi virum à Domino, I have gotten a man from the Lord,*⁷ wholly, entirely from the Lord; it is the Lord that enabled me to conceive, the Lord that infused a quickening soul into that conception, the Lord that brought into the world that which himself had quickened; without all this might Eve say, my body had been but the house of death, and *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, To God the Lord belong the issues of death.* But then this *exitus à morte* is but *introitus in mortem*; this issue, this deliverance, from that death, the death of the womb, is an entrance, a delivering over to another death, the manifold deaths of this world; we have a winding-sheet in our mother's womb which grows with us from our conception, and we come into the world wound up in that winding-sheet, for we come to seek a grave. And as prisoners discharged of actions may lie for fees, so when the womb hath discharged us, yet we are bound to it by cords of hestae, by such a string as that we cannot go thence, nor stay there; we celebrate our own funerals with cries even at our birth; as though our threescore and ten years' life were spent in our mother's labour, and our circle made up in the first point thereof; we beg our baptism with another sacrament, with tears; and we come into a world that lasts many ages, but we last not. *In domo Patris,* says our Saviour, speaking of heaven, *multae mansiones,* divers and durable; so that if a man cannot possess a martyr's house (he hath shed no blood for Christ), yet he may have a confessor's, he hath been ready to glorify

4 [Isaiah 37:3.](#)

5 [Rom. 7:24.](#)

6 [Gen. 6:14.](#)

7 [Gen. 4:1.](#)

God in the shedding of his blood. And if a woman cannot possess a virgin's house (she hath embraced the holy state of marriage), yet she may have a matron's house, she hath brought forth and brought up children in the fear of God. *In domo Patris, in my Father's house*, in heaven, there *are many mansions*; ⁸ but here, upon earth, the Son of man hath not where to lay his head, ⁹ saith he himself. *Nonne terram dedit filiis hominum?* How then hath God given this earth to the sons of men? He hath given them earth for their materials to be made of earth, and he hath given them earth for their grave and sepulchre, to return and resolve to earth, but not for their possession. *Here we have no continuing city*, ¹⁰ nay, no cottage that continues, nay, no persons, no bodies, that continue. Whatsoever moved Saint Jerome to call the journeys of the Israelites in the wilderness, ¹¹ mansions; the word (the word is *nasang*) signifies but a journey, but a peregrination. Even the Israel of God hath no mansions, but journeys, pilgrimages in this life. By what measure did Jacob measure his life to Pharaoh? *The days of the years of my pilgrimage*. ¹² And though the apostle would not say *morimur*, that whilst we are in the body we are dead, yet he says, *perigrinamur*, whilst we are in the body we are but in a pilgrimage, and we are *absent from the Lord*: ¹³ he might have said dead, for this whole world is but an universal churchyard, but our common grave, and the life and motion that the greatest persons have in it is but as the shaking of buried bodies in their grave, by an earthquake. That which we call life is but *hebdomada mortium*, a week of death, seven days, seven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seven times over; and there is an end. Our birth dies in infancy, and our infancy dies in youth, and youth and the rest die in age, and age also dies and determines all. Nor do all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth, arise so, as the phoenix out of the ashes of another phoenix formerly dead, but as a wasp or a serpent out of a carrion, or as a snake out of dung. Our youth is worse than our infancy, and our age worse than our youth. Our youth is hungry and thirsty after those sins which our infancy knew not; and our age is sorry and angry, that it cannot pursue those sins which our youth did; and besides, all the way, so many deaths, that is, so many deadly calamities accompany every condition and every period of this life, as that death itself would be an ease to them that suffer them. Upon this sense doth Job wish that God had not given him an issue from the first death, from the womb, *Wherefore thou hast brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye seen me! I should have been as though I had not been*. ¹⁴ And not only the impatient Israelites in their

8 [John 14:2](#).

9 [Matt. 8:20](#).

10 [Heb. 13:14](#).

11 [Exod. 17:1](#).

12 [Gen. 47:9](#).

13 [2 Cor. 5:6](#).

14 [Job 10:18, 19](#).

murmuring (*would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt*),¹⁵ but Elijah himself, when he fled from Jezebel, and went for his life, as that text says, under the juniper tree, requested that he might die, and said, *It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life*.¹⁶ So Jonah justifies his impatience, nay, his anger, towards God himself: *Now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better to die than to live*.¹⁷ And when God asked him, *Dost thou well to be angry for this?* he replies, *I do well to be angry, even unto death*. How much worse a death than death is this life, which so good men would so often change for death! But if my case be as Saint Paul's case, *quotidiè morior*, that I die daily, that something heavier than death fall upon me every day; if my case be David's case, *tota die mortificamur; all the day long we are killed*, that not only every day, but every hour of the day, something heavier than death fall upon me; though that be true of me, *Conceptus in peccatis, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me* (there I died one death); though that be true of me, *Natus filius irae*, I was born not only the child of sin, but the child of wrath, of the wrath of God for sin, which is a heavier death: yet *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, with God the Lord are the issues of death*; and after a Job, and a Joseph, and a Jeremiah, and a Daniel, I cannot doubt of a deliverance. And if no other deliverance conduce more to his glory and my good, yet he hath the keys of death,¹⁸ and he can let me out at that door, that is, deliver me from the manifold deaths of this world, the *omni die*, and the *tota die*, the every day's death and every hour's death, by that one death, the final dissolution of body and soul, the end of all. But then is that the end of all? Is that dissolution of body and soul the last death that the body shall suffer (for of spiritual death we speak not now). It is not, though this be *exitus à morte*: it is *introitus in mortem*; though it be an issue from manifold deaths of this world, yet it is an entrance into the death of corruption and putrefaction, and vermiculation, and incineration, and dispersion in and from the grave, in which every dead man dies over again. It was a prerogative peculiar to Christ, not to die this death, not to see corruption. What gave him this privilege? Not Joseph's great proportion of gums and spices, that might have preserved his body from corruption and incineration longer than he needed it, longer than three days, but it would not have done it for ever. What preserved him then? Did his exemption and freedom from original sin preserve him from this corruption and incineration? It is true that original sin hath induced this corruption and incineration upon us; if we had not sinned in Adam, *mortality had not put on immortality*¹⁹ (as the apostle speaks), nor *corruption had not put on incorruption*, but we had had our

15 Exod. 16:3.

16 1 Kings 19:4

17 Jonah 4:3.

18 Rev. 1:18.

19 1 Cor. 15:33.

transmigration from this to the other world without any mortality, any corruption at all. But yet since Christ took sin upon him, so far as made him mortal, he had it so far too as might have made him see this corruption and incineration, though he had no original sin in himself; what preserved him then? Did the hypostatical union of both natures, God and man, preserve him from this corruption and incineration? It is true that this was a most powerful embalming, to be embalmed with the Divine Nature itself, to be embalmed with eternity, was able to preserve him from corruption and incineration for ever. And he was embalmed so, embalmed with the Divine Nature itself, even in his body as well as in his soul; for the Godhead, the Divine Nature, did not depart, but remained still united to his dead body in the grave; but yet for all this powerful embalming, his hypostatical union of both natures, we see Christ did die; and for all his union which made him God and man, he became no man (for the union of the body and soul makes the man, and he whose soul and body are separated by death as long as that state lasts, is properly no man). And therefore as in him the dissolution of body and soul was no dissolution of the hypostatical union, so there is nothing that constrains us to say, that though the flesh of Christ had seen corruption and incineration in the grave, this had not been any dissolution of the hypostatical union, for the Divine nature, the Godhead, might have remained with all the elements and principles of Christ's body, as well as it did with the two constitutive parts of his person, his body and his soul. This incorruption then was not in Joseph's gums and spices, nor was it in Christ's innocency, and exemption from original sin, nor was it (that is, it is not necessary to say it was) in the hypostatical union. But this incorruptibleness of his flesh is most conveniently placed in that; *Non dabis, thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption*; we look no further for causes or reasons in the mysteries of religion, but to the will and pleasure of God; Christ himself limited his inquisition in that *ita est, even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight*. Christ's body did not see corruption, therefore, because God had decreed it should not. The humble soul (and only the humble soul is the religious soul) rests himself upon God's purposes and the decrees of God which he hath declared and manifested, not such as are conceived and imagined in ourselves, though upon some probability, some verisimilitude; so in our present case Peter proceeds in his sermon at Jerusalem, and so Paul in his at Antioch.²⁰ They preached Christ to have been risen without seeing corruption, not only because God had decreed it, but because he had manifested that decree in his prophet, therefore doth Saint Paul cite by special number the second Psalm for that decree, and therefore both Saint Peter and Saint Paul cite for it that place in the sixteenth Psalm;²¹ for when God declares his decree and purpose in the express words of his prophet, or when he declares it in the real execution of the decree, then he makes it ours, then he manifests

20 Acts 2:31; 13:35.

21 Ver. 10.

it to us. And therefore, as the mysteries of our religion are not the objects of our reason, but by faith we rest on God's decree and purpose--(it is so, O God, because it is thy will it should be so)--so God's decrees are ever to be considered in the manifestation thereof. All manifestation is either in the word of God, or in the execution of the decree; and when these two concur and meet it is the strongest demonstration that can be: when therefore I find those marks of adoption and spiritual filiation which are delivered in the word of God to be upon me; when I find that real execution of his good purpose upon me, as that actually I do live under the obedience and under the conditions which are evidences of adoption and spiritual filiation; then, so long as I see these marks and live so, I may safely comfort myself in a holy certitude and a modest infallibility of my adoption. Christ determines himself in that, the purpose of God was manifest to him; Saint Peter and Saint Paul determine themselves in those two ways of knowing the purpose of God, the word of God before the execution of the decree in the fulness of time. It was prophesied before, said they, and it is performed now, Christ is risen without seeing corruption. Now, this which is so singularly peculiar to him, that his flesh should not see corruption, at his second coming, his coming to judgment, shall extend to all that are then alive; their hestae shall not see corruption, because, as the apostle says, and says as a secret, as a mystery, *Behold I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep* (that is, not continue in the state of the dead in the grave), *but we shall all be changed in an instant*, we shall have a dissolution, and in the same instant a redintegration, a recompacting of body and soul, and that shall be truly a death and truly a resurrection, but no sleeping in corruption; but for us that die now and sleep in the state of the dead, we must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay, this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave, when these bodies that have been the children of royal parents, and the parents of royal children, must say with Job, *Corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister*. Miserable riddle, when the same worm must be my mother, and my sister and myself! Miserable incest, when I must be married to my mother and my sister, and be both father and mother to my own mother and sister, beget and bear that worm which is all that miserable penury; when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the *worm shall feed, and feed sweetly*[369]²² upon me; when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction, if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust. *One dieth at his full strength, being wholly at ease and in quiet; and another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure; but they lie down alike in the dust, and the worm covers them.*²³ In Job and in Isaiah,²⁴ it covers them and is spread under

22 [Job 24:20.](#)

23 [Job 21:23, 25, 26.](#)

24 [Isaiah 14:11.](#)

them, *the worm is spread under thee, and the worm covers thee*. There are the mats and the carpets that lie under, and there are the state and the canopy that hang over the greatest of the sons of men. Even those bodies that were the *temples of the Holy Ghost* come to this dilapidation, to ruin, to rubbish, to dust; even the Israel of the Lord, and Jacob himself, hath no other specification, no other denomination, but that *vermis Jacob*, thou worm of Jacob. Truly the consideration of this posthume death, this death after burial, that after God (with whom are the issues of death) hath delivered me from the death of the womb, by bringing me into the world, and from the manifold deaths of the world, by laying me in the grave, I must die again in an incineration of this flesh, and in a dispersion of that dust. That that monarch, who spread over many nations alive, must in his dust lie in a corner of that sheet of lead, and there but so long as that lead will last; and that private and retired man, that thought himself his own for ever, and never came forth, must in his dust of the grave be published, and (such are the revolutions of the grave) be mingled with the dust of every highway and of every dunghill, and swallowed in every puddle and pond. This is the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that we can consider. God seems to have carried the declaration of his power to a great height, when he sets the prophet Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones, and says, *Son of man, can these bones live?* as though it had been impossible, and yet they did; the Lord laid *sinews upon them, and flesh, and breathed into them, and they did live*. But in that case there were bones to be seen, something visible, of which it might be said, *Can this thing live?* But in this death of incineration and dispersion of dust, we see nothing that we call that man's. If we say, *Can this dust live?* Perchance it cannot; it may be the mere dust of the earth, which never did live, never shall. It may be the dust of that man's worm, which did live, but shall no more. It may be the dust of another man, that concerns not him of whom it was asked. This death of incineration and dispersion is, to natural reason, the most irrecoverable death of all; and yet *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, unto God the Lord belong the issues of death*; and by recompacting this dust into the same body, and remaining the same body with the same soul, he shall in a blessed and glorious resurrection give me such an issue from this death as shall never pass into any other death, but establish me into a life that shall last as long as the Lord of Life himself.

And so have you that that belongs to the first acceptation of these words (*unto God the Lord belong the issues of death*); That though from the womb to the grave, and in the grave itself, we pass from death to death, yet, as Daniel speaks, *the Lord our God is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us*.

And so we pass unto our second accommodation of these words (*unto God the Lord belong the issues of death*); that it belongs to God, and not to man, to pass a judgment upon us at our death, or to conclude a dereliction on God's part upon the manner thereof.

Those indications which the physicians receive, and those presagitions which they give for death or recovery in the patient, they receive and they give out of the grounds and the rules of their art, but we have no such rule or art to give a presagition of spiritual death and damnation upon any such indication as we see in any dying man; we see often enough to be sorry, but not to despair; we may be deceived both ways: we use to comfort ourself in the death of a friend, if it be testified that he went away like a lamb, that is, without any reluctance; but God knows that may be accompanied with a dangerous damp and stupefaction, and insensibility of his present state. Our blessed Saviour suffered colluctations with death, and a *sadness even in his soul to death*, and an agony even to a bloody sweat in his body, and expostulations with God, and exclamations upon the cross. He was a devout man who said upon his death-bed, or death-turf (for he was a hermit), *Septuaginta annos Domino servivisti, et mori times?* Hast thou served a good master threescore and ten years, and now art thou loth to go into his presence? Yet Hilarion was loth. Barlaam was a devout man (a hermit too) that said that day he died, *Cogita te hodie caepisse servire Domino, et hodie finiturum*, Consider this to be the first day's service that ever thou didst thy Master, to glorify him in a Christianly and a constant death, and if thy first day be thy last day too, how soon dost thou come to receive thy wages! Yet Barlaam could have been content to have stayed longer forth. Make no ill conclusions upon any man's lothness to die, for the mercies of God work momentarily in minutes, and many times insensibly to bystanders, or any other than the party departing. And then upon violent deaths inflicted as upon malefactors, Christ himself hath forbidden us by his own death to make any ill conclusion; for his own death had those impressions in it; he was reputed, he was executed as a malefactor, and no doubt many of them who concurred to his death did believe him to be so. Of sudden death there are scarce examples be found in the Scriptures upon good men, for death in battle cannot be called sudden death; but God governs not by examples but by rules, and therefore make no ill conclusion upon sudden death nor upon distempers neither, though perchance accompanied with some words of diffidence and distrust in the mercies of God. The tree lies as it falls, it is true, but it is not the last stroke that fells the tree, nor the last word nor gasp that qualifies the soul. Still pray we for a peaceable life against violent death, and for time of repentance against sudden death, and for sober and modest assurance against distempered and diffident death, but never make ill conclusions upon persons overtaken with such deaths; *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, to God the Lord belong the issues of death*. And he received Samson, who went out of this world in such a manner (consider it actively, consider it passively in his own death, and in those whom he slew with himself) as was subject to interpretation hard enough. Yet the Holy Ghost hath moved Saint Paul to celebrate Samson in his great catalogue,²⁵ and so doth all the church. Our critical day is not the very day of our death,

25 [Heb. 11.](#)

but the whole course of our life. I thank him that prays for me when the bell tolls, but I thank him much more that catechises me, or preaches to me, or instructs me how to live. *Fac hoc et vive*, there is my security, the mouth of the Lord hath said it, *do this and thou shalt live*. But though I do it, yet I shall die too, die a bodily, a natural death. But God never mentions, never seems to consider that death, the bodily, the natural death. God doth not say, Live well, and thou shalt die well, that is, an easy, a quiet death; but, Live well here, and thou shalt live well for ever. As the first part of a sentence pieces well with the last, and never respects, never hearkens after the parenthesis that comes between, so doth a good life here flow into an eternal life, without any consideration what so manner of death we die. But whether the gate of my prison be opened with an oiled key (by a gentle and preparing sickness), or the gate be hewn down by a violent death, or the gate be burnt down by a raging and frantic fever, a gate into heaven I shall have, for from the Lord is the cause of my life, and *with God the Lord are the issues of death*. And further we carry not this second acceptation of the words, as this *issue of death* is *liberatio in morte*, God's care that the soul be safe, what agonies soever the body suffers in the hour of death.

But pass to our third part and last part: As this issue of death is *liberatio per mortem*, a deliverance by the death of another. *Sufferentiam Job audiisti, et vidisti finem Domini*, says Saint James (v. 11), *You have heard of the patience of Job*, says he: all this while you have done that, for in every man, calamitous, miserable man, a Job speaks. Now, *see the end of the Lord*, sayeth that apostle, which is not that end that the Lord proposed to himself (salvation to us), nor the end which he proposes to us (conformity to him), but *see the end of the Lord*, says he, the end that the Lord himself came to, death, and a painful and a shameful death. But why did he die? and why die so? *Quia Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis* (as Saint Augustine, interpreting this text, answers that question),²⁶ because to this *God our Lord belonged the issues of death*. *Quid apertius diceretur?* says he there, what can be more obvious, more manifest than this sense of these words? In the former part of this verse it is said, He that is *our God is the God of salvation; Deus salvos faciendi*, so he reads it, the God that must save us. Who can that be, says he, but Jesus? For therefore that name was given him because he was to save us. And to this Jesus, says he, this Saviour,²⁷ *belong the issues of death; Nec oportuit eum de hac vita alios exitus habere quam mortis*: being come into this life in our mortal nature, he could not go out of this life any other way but by death. *Ideo dictum*, says he, therefore it is said, *to God the Lord belonged the issues of death; ut ostenderetur moriendo nos salvos facturum*, to show that his way to save us was to die. And from this text doth Saint Isidore prove that Christ was truly man (which as many sects of heretics denied, as that he was truly God), because to him, though he were *Dominus Dominus* (as the text doubles it),

26 De Civitate Dei, lib. 17.

27 [Matt. 1:21](#).

God the Lord, yet to *him*, to God the Lord belonged the issues of death; *oportuit eum pati*; more cannot be said than Christ himself says of himself; *These things Christ ought to suffer*; ²⁸ he had no other way but death: so then this part of our sermon must needs be a passion sermon, since all his life was a continual passion, all our Lent may well be a continual Good Friday. Christ's painful life took off none of the pains of his death, he felt not the less then for having felt so much before. Nor will any thing that shall be said before lessen, but rather enlarge the devotion, to that which shall be said of his passion at the time of due solemnization thereof. Christ bled not a drop the less at the last for having bled at his circumcision before, nor will you a tear the less then if you shed some now. And therefore be now content to consider with me how *to this God the Lord belonged the issues of death*. That God, this Lord, the Lord of life, could die, is a strange contemplation; that the Red Sea could be dry, that the sun could stand still, that an oven could be seven times heat and not burn, that lions could be hungry and not bite, is strange, miraculously strange, but super-miraculous that God *could* die; but that God *would* die is an exaltation of that. But even of that also it is a super-exaltation, that God should die, must die, and *non exitus* (said Saint Augustine), God the Lord had no issue but by death, and *oportuit pati* (says Christ himself), all this Christ ought to suffer, was bound to suffer; *Deus ultimo Deus*, says David, God is the God of revenges, he would not pass over the son of man unrevenged, unpunished. But then *Deus ultionum libere egit* (says that place), the God of revenges works freely, he punishes, he spares whom he will. And would he not spare himself? he would not: *Dilectio fortis ut mors, love is strong as death*; ²⁹ stronger, it drew in death, that naturally is not welcome. *Si possibile*, says Christ, *if it be possible, let this cup pass*, when his love, expressed in a former decree with his Father, had made it impossible. *Many waters quench not love*. ³⁰ Christ tried many: he was baptised out of his love, and his love determined not there; he mingled blood with water in his agony, and that determined not his love; he wept pure blood, all his blood at all his eyes, at all his pores, in his flagellation and thorns (*to the Lord our God belonged the issues of blood*), and these expressed, but these did not quench his love. He would not spare, nay, he could not spare himself. There was nothing more free, more voluntary, more spontaneous than the death of Christ. It is true, *libere egit*, he died voluntarily; but yet when we consider the contract that had passed between his Father and him, there was an *oportuit*, a kind of necessity upon him: all this *Christ ought to suffer*. And when shall we date this obligation, this *oportuit*, this necessity? When shall we say that began? Certainly this decree by which Christ was to suffer all this was an eternal decree, and was there any thing before that that was eternal? Infinite love, eternal love; be pleased to follow this home, and to consider

28 [Luke 24:26](#).

29 [Cant. 8:6](#).

30 [Cant. 8:7](#).

it seriously, that what liberty soever we can conceive in Christ to die or not to die; this necessity of dying, this decree is as eternal as that liberty; and yet how small a matter made he of this necessity and this dying? His Father calls it but a bruise, and but a bruising of his heel³¹ (the serpent shall bruise his heel), and yet that was, that the serpent should practise and compass his death. Himself calls it but a baptism, as though he were to be the better for it. *I have a baptism to be baptized with*,³² and he was in pain till it was accomplished, and yet this baptism was his death. The Holy Ghost calls it joy (*for the joy which was set before him he endured the cross*),³³ which was not a joy of his reward after his passion, but a joy that filled him even in the midst of his torments, and arose from him; when Christ calls his *calicem* a cup, and no worse (*Can ye drink of my cup*)³⁴, he speaks not odiously, not with detestation of it. Indeed it was a cup, *salus mundo*, a health to all the world. And *quid retribuam*, says David, *What shall I render to the Lord?*³⁵ Answer you with David, *Accipiam calicem, I will take the cup of salvation*; take it, that cup is salvation, his passion, if not into your present imitation, yet into your present contemplation. And behold how that Lord that was God, yet could die, would die, must die for our salvation. That Moses and Elias talked with Christ in the transfiguration, both Saint Matthew and Saint Mark³⁶ tells us, but what they talked of, only Saint Luke; *Dicebant excessum ejus*, says he, *They talked of his disease, of his death, which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem*.³⁷ The word is of his *exodus*, the very word of our text, *exitus*, his *issue by death*. Moses, who in his exodus had prefigured this issue of our Lord, and in passing Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea, had foretold in that actual prophecy, Christ passing of mankind through the sea of his blood; and Elias, whose exodus and issue of this world was a figure of Christ's ascension; had no doubt a great satisfaction in talking with our blessed Lord, *de excessu ejus*, of the full consummation of all this in his death, which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem. Our meditation of his death should be more visceral, and affect us more, because it is of a thing already done. The ancient Romans had a certain tenderness and detestation of the name of death; they could not name death, no, not in their wills; there they could not say, *Si mori contigerit*, but *si quid humanitas contingat*, not if or when I die, but when the course of nature is accomplished upon me. To us that speak daily of the death of Christ (he was crucified, dead, and buried), can the memory or the mention of our own death be irksome or bitter? There are in these latter times amongst

31 [Gen. 3:15.](#)

32 [Luke 12:50.](#)

33 [Heb. 12:2.](#)

34 [Matt. 20:22.](#)

35 [Psalm 116:12.](#)

36 [Matt. 17:3](#); [Mark 9:4.](#)

37 [Luke 9:31.](#)

us that name death freely enough, and the death of God, but in blasphemous oaths and execrations. Miserable men, who shall therefore be said never to have named Jesus, because they have named him too often; and therefore hear Jesus say, *Nescivi vos, I never knew you*, because they made themselves too familiar with him. Moses and Elias talked with Christ of his death only in a holy and joyful sense, of the benefit which they and all the world were to receive by that. Discourses of religion should not be out of curiosity, but to edification. And then they talked with Christ of his death at that time when he was in the greatest height of glory, that ever he admitted in this world, that is, his transfiguration. And we are afraid to speak to the great men of this world of their death, but nourish in them a vain imagination of immortality and immutability. But *bonum est nobis esse hic* (as Saint Peter said there), *It is good to dwell here*, in this consideration of his death, and therefore transfer we our tabernacle (our devotions) through some of those steps which God the Lord made to his *issue of death* that day. Take in the whole day from the hour that Christ received the passover upon Thursday unto the hour in which he died the next day. Make this present day that day in thy devotion, and consider what he did, and remember what you have done. Before he instituted and celebrated the sacrament (which was after the eating of the passover), he proceeded to that act of humility, to wash his disciples' feet, even Peter's, who for a while resisted him. In thy preparation to the holy and blessed sacrament, hast thou with a sincere humility sought a reconciliation with all the world, even with those that have been averse from it, and refused that reconciliation from thee? If so, and not else, thou hast spent that first part of his last day in a conformity with him. After the sacrament he spent the time till night in prayer, in preaching, in psalms: hast thou considered that a worthy receiving of the sacrament consists in a continuation of holiness after, as well as in a preparation before? If so, thou hast therein also conformed thyself to him; so Christ spent his time till night. At night he went into the garden to pray, and he prayed prolixious, he spent much time in prayer, how much? Because it is literally expressed, that he prayed there three several times,³⁸ and that returning to his disciples after his first prayer, and finding them asleep, said, *Could ye not watch with me one hour,*³⁹ it is collected that he spent three hours in prayer. I dare scarce ask thee whither thou wentest, or how thou disposedst of thyself, when it grew dark and after last night. If that time were spent in a holy recommendation of thyself to God, and a submission of thy will to his, it was spent in a conformity to him. In that time, and in those prayers, was his agony and bloody sweat. I will hope that thou didst pray; but not every ordinary and customary prayer, but prayer actually accompanied with shedding of tears and dispositively in a readiness to shed blood for his glory in necessary cases, puts thee into a conformity with him. About midnight he was taken and bound with a kiss, art thou not too

38 [Luke 22:41](#).

39 [Matt. 26:40](#).

conformable to him in that? Is not that too literally, too exactly thy case, at midnight to have been taken and bound with a kiss? From thence he was carried back to Jerusalem, first to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and (as late as it was) then he was examined and buffeted, and delivered over to the custody of those officers from whom he received all those irrisions, and violences, the covering of his face, the spitting upon his face, the blasphemies of words, and the smartness of blows, which that gospel mentions: in which compass fell that gallicinium, that crowing of the cock which called up Peter to his repentance. How thou passedst all that time thou knowest. If thou didst any thing that needest Peter's tears, and hast not shed them, let me be thy cock, do it now. Now, thy Master (in the unworthiest of his servants) looks back upon thee, do it now. Betimes, in the morning, so soon as it was day, the Jews held a council in the high priest's hall, and agreed upon their evidence against him, and then carried him to Pilate, who was to be his judge; didst thou accuse thyself when thou wakedst this morning, and wast thou content even with false accusations, that is, rather to suspect actions to have been sin, which were not, than to smother and justify such as were truly sins? Then thou spentest that hour in conformity to him; Pilate found no evidence against him, and therefore to ease himself, and to pass a compliment upon Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, who was at that time at Jerusalem (because Christ, being a Galilean, was of Herod's jurisdiction), Pilate sent him to Herod, and rather as a madman than a malefactor; Herod remanded him (with scorn) to Pilate, to proceed against him; and this was about eight of the clock. Hast thou been content to come to this inquisition, this examination, this agitation, this cribration, this pursuit of thy conscience; to sift it, to follow it from the sins of thy youth to thy present sins, from the sins of thy bed to the sins of thy board, and from the substance to the circumstance of thy sins? That is time spent like thy Saviour's. Pilate would have saved Christ, by using the privilege of the day in his behalf, because that day one prisoner was to be delivered, but they choose Barabbas; he would have saved him from death, by satisfying their fury with inflicting other torments upon him, scourging and crowning with thorns, and loading him with many scornful and ignominious contumelies, but they regarded him not, they pressed a crucifying. Hast thou gone about to redeem thy sin, by fasting, by alms, by disciplines and mortifications, in way of satisfaction to the justice of God? That will not serve that is not the right way; we press an utter crucifying of that sin that governs thee: and that conforms thee to Christ. Towards noon Pilate gave judgment, and they made such haste to execution as that by noon he was upon the cross. There now hangs that sacred body upon the cross, rebaptized in his own tears, and sweat, and embalmed in his own blood alive. There are those bowels of compassion which are so conspicuous, so manifested, as that you may see them through his wounds. There those glorious eyes grew faint in their sight, so as the sun, ashamed to survive them, departed with his light too. And then that Son of God, who was never from us, and yet had now come a new way unto us in assuming our nature, delivers that soul (which was never out of his Father's hands) by a new way, a voluntary

emission of it into his Father's hands; for though *to this God our Lord belonged these issues of death*, so that considered in his own contract, he must necessarily die, yet at no breach or battery which they had made upon his sacred body issued his soul; but *emisit*, he gave up the ghost; and as God breathed a soul into the first Adam, so this second Adam breathed his soul into God, into the hands of God.

There we leave you in that blessed dependency, to hang upon him that hangs upon the cross, there bathe in his tears, there suck at his wounds, and lie down in peace in his grave, till he vouchsafe you a resurrection, and an ascension into that kingdom which He hath prepared for you with the inestimable price of his incorruptible blood. Amen.

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