

A reflection based on the Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution "Gaudium et spes" (On the Church in the Modern World)

The puzzle of being human is most confusing when face to face with death. We are not only tormented by pain and the gradual dissolution of our bodies, but also, and even more so, by the fear of complete extinction. We react instinctively against the idea that we should come to a complete end, and we are right to do so. Our inner sense of eternity cannot be simply reduced to the bodies we know must die. Science and technology are wonderful indeed, but they cannot calm our most basic anxieties: keeping our earthly life going longer does not satisfy our inner longing for a life beyond what we know here and now.

Our imagination is completely helpless when confronted with death. And yet, under God's guidance, the Church tells us that we have been created for a destiny of happiness beyond the reach of earthly trials. Moreover, the Christian faith teaches that bodily death will be conquered; the almighty and merciful Saviour will make us whole again. God has called us, and still calls us, to share the immortality of the divine life, in perfect union with himself. This victory has been gained for us by the risen Christ, who by his own death has freed us from death.

Faith thus offers our minds the answer to our questions about our future destiny. At the same time, it unites us in Christ with our loved ones who have been taken from us by death and gives us hope that they have entered into true life with God.

Of course, Christians like everyone else have to struggle against many difficulties and ultimately die. But, by travelling the Easter journey with Christ and being made like him in death, we can look forward, strong in hope, to the resurrection.

Lectio altera

Ex Constitutióne pastoráli "Gaudium et spes" Concílii Vaticáni secúndi de Ecclésia in mundo huius tēporis

(Nn. 18. 22)

Mysterium mortis

Coram morte ænigma condiciónis humánæ máximum evádit. Non tantum cruciátur homo dolóre et córporis dissolutióne progrediénte, sed étiam, immo magis, perpétuæ exstinctiÓNis timóre. Recte autem instínctu cordis sui iúdicat, cum totálem ruínam et definitívum éxitum suæ persónæ abhórret et réspuit. Semen æternitátis quod in se gerit, ad solam matériam cum irreductibile sit, contra mortem insúrgit. Omnia téchnicæ artis molímina. licet perutília, anxietátem hómínis sedáre non valent: prorogáta enim biológica longævitas illi ulteriÓris vitæ desidério satisfácere nequit, quod cordi eius ineluctabíliter inest.

Dum coram morte omnis imaginatio déficit, Ecclesia tamen, revelatióne divína edócta, hóminem ad beátum finem, ultra terréstris misériæ límites, a Deo creatum esse affírmát. Mors ínsuper corporális, a qua homo si non peccásset subtráctus fuísset, fides christiána docet fore ut vincátur, cum homo in salútem, culpa sua pérditam, ab omnipoténte et miseránte Salvatóre restituétur. Deus enim hóminem vocávit et vocat, ut ei in perpétua incorruptíbilis vitæ divínæ communióne tota sua natúra adhæreat. Quam victóriam Christus, hóminem a morte per mortem suam liberándo, ad vitam resúrgens adéptus est. Cuicúmque ígitur recogitánti hómini fides, cum sólidis arguméntis oblata, in eius anxietáte de sorte futúra respónsum offert; simúlque facultátem præbet cum diléctis frátribus iam morte præréptis in Christo comunicándi, spem cónferens eos veram vitam apud Deum adéptos esse.

Christiánum certe urgent necéssitas et offíciúm contra malum per multas tribulatiónes certándi necnon mortem patiéndi; sed mystérió pascháli consociátus, Christi morti configurátus, ad resurrectiónem spe roborátus occúrret.

Quod non tantum pro christifidélibus valet, sed et pro ómnibus homínibus bonæ voluntátis in quorum corde grátia invisíbili modo operátur. Cum enim pro ómnibus mórtuus sit Christus cumque vocátio hóminis última revéra una sit, scílicet divína, tenére debémus Spíritum Sanctum cunctis possibilitátem offérre ut, modo Deo cógnito, huic pascháli mystérió consociéntur.

Tale et tantum est hóminis mystérium, quod per revelatiónem christiánam credéntibus illucéscit. Per Christum et in Christo, ígitur, illuminátur ænígma dolóris et mortis, quod extra eius Evangélium nos óbruit. Christus resurréxit, morte sua mortem déstruens, vitámque nobis largítus est ut, filii in Fílio, clamémus in Spíritu: Abba, Pater!