

# There is No Time With God

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*Summary: Meditation on dying and praying for the dead. Enumerates the many people on a list kept in her missal. Recalls that Fr. Zachery, her confessor, taught her that “There is no time with God.” (DDLW #657).*

When the late President Roosevelt spoke of the four freedoms, he did not get down to the root fear which is the fear of death, whether by hunger or the atom bomb, whether the slow death of insecurity or wounds, or disease, plague or famine, or the quick death of obliteration bombing. We all have it, no use denying it, and it is quite different from the holy fear of the Lord, which is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Plato said, “those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead. But if this be true it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives and then be troubled when that came for which they had all along been eagerly practicing.”

Holy Mother Church sets apart the month of November for the faithful to meditate on dying and to pray for the dead. In all her churches she begins the month with All Saints day, rejoicing with those who have achieved the beatific vision, and the next day every priest offers three Masses for the souls in purgatory. It is not a matter of faith to believe that any one is damned to hell, though it is a matter of faith to believe that there is a hell.

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Some 26 years ago, the son of a friend of mine, a young lad eighteen years old, committed suicide by turning on the gas. His mother stayed with me afterwards and I was a witness to the profound and hopeless grief of one who did not believe in another life past the grave where life “was changed, not taken away.” In my sorrow I approached Fr. Zachary, my confessor at the little church on Fourteenth Street, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and asked him how could one pray for a suicide, if suicide was a mortal sin and one was damned into hell by this act.

This dear and kindly priest, who is dead himself now, God rest his soul, told me this. \*\*\*“There is no time with God.” All the prayers you will say in the future for this soul will count. God has said. ‘ask and ye shall receive.’ He has promised this. If you keep on asking for God’s mercy for that soul, you can be sure your prayers are answered. At the moment of death, when the soul is released from the down drag of the body, there is given a choice—do you prefer darkness to light, evil to good, denial rather than assent?” Assurance from this holy priest has been a comfort to me ever since. So always when I make my lists of “dear

departed” to keep in my missal so that I remember each day, at the commemoration for the dead, to hold their names before God, I include his—Wally’s.

This is a custom blessed by the Church too, since we are given envelopes and slips to contain our lists, so that these names may be remembered at the altar of God.

Heading my list, of course, are parents and relatives, then Peter Maurin, Charlie O’Rourke, Larry Heaney, John Curran and all other associates of the Catholic Worker movement. I’m going to list all the names I have right now in my missal so that those who read this column will say with me, “May God have mercy on his or her soul. May he dwell in a place of refreshment, light and peace.”

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There is Fr. Lacouture who died two years ago in Canada; who is responsible for the retreat which we have as often each year as we can find priests to give it at Maryfarm, Newburgh. Next to his name Mr. de Aragon, a Spanish anarchist who had fallen away from the faith and who died without the sacraments. There is this juxtaposition of names because both men died the same winter. Then there are a whole series of wonderful priests whom I remember with love and respect and gratitude, Fr; Roche, a young priest who died saving others in an explosion in Texas, Fr. Hollahan, our pastor at Easton, Abbot Dunne of Gethsemane who wrote us regularly every two months and sent us help; Bishop Griffin of Springfield, who loved the workers, Bishop Boyle and now Bishop Haas; Fr. Corcoran, who gave us conferences on the Mystical Body of Christ at the Oakmont retreats, Pittsburgh, and who died of cancer; Fr. Carey, Jesuit of Worcester, Mass., who also died of cancer, and I believe, taught right up to the last; Bishop Schlarman of Peoria, who was so active in the rural life work; Monsignor Gaffney of New York, who gave us permission to have Mass at our farms and the Blessed Sacrament—with us—what gratitude we owe him; and the benefactors who gave us the use of Mott St. in New York, Miss Gertrude Burke, and Mary Lane; Miss Du Bois of Biddeford, who helped us buy Maryfarm; Sister Aloysia, who was responsible in so many ways for mine and Tamar’s baptism, who was my sponsor, who taught me my catechism.

The list of names does not go according to merit or closeness of regard but time of death.

One list recalls the tragedy of the families throughout the country these late years; starting with Larry Heaney’s (his two year old child followed him two years after) and Albert Bujak and his children who perished in fire; our own fire this spring which cost the life of Jack Sims; Maeve Durnin, who died of cancer, oldest child of Mary and Emmet, dear friends and fellow workers; little Charlie Smith, aged six, member of our family here at Peter Maurin farm who died by drowning this summer.

There are the fathers and husbands and wives of friends, Mr. Naughton, Mr. Dolan, Mr. Burrow, Sigrid Undset, Paul St. Marie. Paul was the first organizer and the first president of the Ford local in Detroit, and he died a martyr to the cause of organized labor. He was a gay and happy soul and I remember him attending a social action conference in Milwaukee and saying part of the Office with us and showing pictures of his eight children to all the Bishops, and sending postal cards of breweries to all his friends. There is Mr. Aratari and

Mr. McKeon, brother and father of our friends, and Mrs. Weider and Mrs. Hughes. There is Mr. Hergenhan and Mr. Breen, and Mr. O'Connell, great trials in a way to us all at the CW whose biographies I have written and with a sigh of relief because they had a good end. They led turbulent lives on earth and made life rather turbulent for us all.

There is Bill Duffy. I never wrote his biography, but he is another I sigh over. He drank plenty and he helped both us and the Chinese Communist weekly down the street impartially and when he could get drink no other way, he'd find what he could steal and sell it. I remember hearing of his wheeling a spare tire down the street during the war when tires were rationed, and bystanders around the Catholic Worker, gazing reproachfully after him and clucking with their tongues as they said, "Look at that Bill Duffy, stealing CW property and drinking it up!" And then standing by and watching him do it! How I could have belabored them all, pacifist that I am!

We tried putting him out, but old Bill slept on the sidewalk in front of the place all summer, edging into the hall as the weather got cooler, so that by September we had to take him in again. We found him dead one morning, lying by the bed, and we called the priest and knelt down and said the rosary for him and then called the morgue. He had a nice funeral at Transfiguration Church.

There was Bill Evans who dug a well at Easton farm which is giving water to this day, and he wrote too one of the Ben Toe Lanray articles about sleeping in an old tomb in the Jewish cemetery on Chatham Square. He stole plenty but he helped us plenty too and he tried over and over again to pull himself out of the gutter. Far worse were the pharisees who used to cluck also. "Look at that Bill saying the rosary tonight when he was drunk as a lord last night." Thank God he prayed. The Blessed Mother is remembering him now since he remembered her then.

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There's no end to this list, or rather to the things I could say about the people on this list. There are those who died this summer, relatives of benefactors who not only share their substance with us, but their sorrows. There is Natalie D'Arcy's nephew, and Mrs. Strumpen-Darrie's husband, and Albert Eisele and Simon Buckley. Albert was a farmer and a writer and many know of him: Simon helped in our kitchen at Chrystie Street.

There are the old helpers, Dan Orr, and Mary Sheehan who used to sell the paper on Fourteenth street with Stanley Vishnewsky in the early days. Dan was our best circulation man, who distributed the paper by horse and cart too, naming the horse Catholic Action. He said the horse genuflected as he passed St. Patrick's Cathedral. He was loud and noisy, was Dan, and shouted the paper on the streets, and who knows how many converts he made. One, a U.S. consul in Europe, told me between assignments how he had bought a paper from Dan in front of Macy's just before he boarded ship for Europe. And Mary, with her Irish wit. Once a Communist said to her "I know your Cardinal—he gets drunk with his housekeeper every Saturday night." (the late Cardinal Hayes), and Mary snapped back, "And doesn't that just show how democratic he is!"

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And then. there are other suicides—Grady Rutledge, Mary McGurdy, Alexander Berkman; and Will Fernandez of Greenwich Village, and Sacco and Vanzetti, both baptized Catholics too, but who had fallen away from the Church if indeed they had ever been raised in it. Undoubtedly they saw the Church as from the outside, looking as though at muddied stained glass which made no sense, which, if they had seen it within would have glowed with the colors of heaven. They loved justice and hated iniquity, they were poor themselves and they loved the poor—a poor fish peddler and a poor shoe maker. God rest them!

And now another—Bill Dunne, who died recently at New York Hospital of a heart ailment, who had been sick for a long time and who just last month had been listed in the Saturday Evening Post as the present Labor editor of The Daily Worker, a good indication of the inaccuracies of most of these articles about Reds. Bill had been a communist it is true but he had been out of the party for some time, and going to sea to earn a living until, he became too ill I worked with his wife for the Anti-Imperialist League years ago and admired them both as people of integrity. He had many cousins who are nuns and I know are praying for him now. Tamar's new baby kept me from going into the city to see him but Roger O'Neil went up to the hospital and we were all trying to find a first floor apartment for him so that when he got out he would not return to the walk up, fifth floor apartment they had been living in. I beg our readers to pray for him to make up for my neglect of this work of mercy.

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How impossible to include all these dead in one article. Joe Bennet, a heart victim in his twenties; who helped me sell the first issue of the Catholic Worker in Union Square, who died in such agony, not wanting to die; Jim McGovren, first mate on an oil tanker, who gave us half his wages until his marriage, who marched with us on picket lines, who wrote us magnificent letters, who loved Claudel, Conrad and who died in the last war, in an open boat, of hunger and thirst. Ferguson, who escaped from a mental hospital after five years of hard labor there, and who could never get an old age pension because he could not account for those years of his life without confessing his escape. He worked valiantly for us on our breadline, was taking instruction and at the moment of death was baptized by Arthur Sheehan; Dan Russell, who came to us from a park bench all but dead with t.b. and who stayed with us long enough to receive the last rites. "This is the happiest time of my life," he gasped, as he lay in our barn down in Easton right after his anointing. He had told us he was recovering from pneumonia, to explain his wasted condition and we had taken him in only to find him dying because he was afraid of hospitals. He had been a mill hand all his life.

How I remember that particular death, with a mixture of wrath and pity and yes, of laughter. I had gone for priest and doctor and leaving the setting up of the table with crucifix and linen and candles to one who was always talking of the liturgical movement, I came back to find nothing done. He did not know how. I had brought the priest and he had brought the Blessed Sacrament, and while he waited outside, with precious Burden on his person, George, the goat, circled around him and no one had sense enough to care for either priest or

goat while I was setting up the table inside. Fritz Eichenberg says we take Death very much for granted, but we are never ready, it seems, we are always taken aback, standing around unprepared, shocked, while a poor creature waits, hungry for all the aid we can give him.

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Sudden death—there have been those too. Ericson, John Ryder, men on the breadline—suddenly gone from us and a sheet thrown over them—while the bystanders wait for the ambulance. Did you call a priest?" is the first question to ask, and I have been shocked to hear cradle Catholics, graduates from Catholic Colleges say, "He was already dead. No use." And the teaching of the church, to which we have not listened, is that in sudden death, even if hours have passed, call the priest! In his hands are the Sacraments of the Church. None can take his place.

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When I first read Leon Bloy's "Woman Who Was Poor," I could not understand what I considered the joy of Clotilde, sitting in the cemetery, praying for her dead. It was morbid, of course, in the true sense of the word. But now that little Charlie Smith has died and has been buried in St. Joseph's cemetery at Rossville, Staten Island, which is a mile from Peter Maurin farm, I can understand that last chapter of the Bloy book. We went there often this summer, and will go there often this month of November, to tend his little grave and those of the two little babies who are buried just next to him in the next plot; and the children all came with us, and ran picking flowers among the grave stones. In the next field, part of a little farm, a cow and geese were grazing, and there was a pear tree which the children ran to raid. They came back with pockets full and we sat on the bench next to our little plot and said the rosary together. Bernadette, and Lucille, Mac and Beckie and Susie, ate their pears and prayed, and the sun warmed us, and the breeze spoke to us of God's Goodness and beauty and there was no sadness there but peace.

When there are many who have gone before, and among those so many who are near and dear, then the ties of this earth, the hold this life has on us, is loosened and we look with joy to the world to come. It is not "natural" to do this, it is true, and it is a matter of faith that these bones shall rise again, and that in our flesh we shall see God our Savior. Like children we live with joy in the present, and we can think with joy of the life to come. Let us so live and work now that we will have them then.