

## Death and Life and Hope

After attending the recent funeral of Pope Francis and the ANZAC Day ceremony at Anzac Cove, Her Excellency The Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, Governor General of Australia, commented on the '**rare convergence of solemn events**'. Her Excellency is right, especially for people of Christian faith. Over the span of nine days, Christians observed Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday, and Anzac Day on 25 April. All of these are truly solemn events, all calling us to contemplate our personal perspective on death, life and hope.

During Lent and Easter, our focus includes the brutal torture of Jesus as he died by crucifixion, followed by the glory of his resurrection three days later. The joy of the resurrection is central to Christian faith – it gives us hope that our lives have a deep meaning as we live them now, and that after our death, we will encounter the Risen Christ as we enter eternal life.

Death will happen to all of us, one day. Regardless of how near or far away our own death is, we've probably all lived long enough to have a family member, close friend, neighbour or colleague die. The relationships we form with those around us are of immense importance to us, so grief and sorrow at the ending or loss of a life are natural to us, even when we have Christian faith that tells us the deceased person has entered eternal life.

Pope Francis wrote about how he understood the transition from dying to entering eternal life:

Death is one more step in life. If you are sure that the Lord will not betray you, then you can go forward with courage. The Lord himself will give you the grace to see life in death. There is an expression that I do not like: 'the House of the Father' or 'going back to the Father's House,' as if our life was a round trip. It would be better to say: 'Go to meet the Lord' or 'I'm going toward that meeting.' There will be a meeting or encounter at the end of life. It's a meeting I may or may not have had in life and it's a meeting that I've been looking forward to or not looking forward to in my life. But in the end, we will meet God face to face.

– Pope Francis in [Sharing the Wisdom of Time](#)

**Sit silently and reflect** on the above passage.

We have just lived through some unusual, moving times. We have been reminded that, as the ancient words of a Gregorian chant state: *In the midst of life, we are in death*. Yet – we have the hope provided by the Resurrection, too...

What thoughts, reflections, emotions come to you as you ponder the interface between life and death, as we have just encountered it over these last few weeks – in our faith and in the events of our world?

Place your reactions before Jesus, whose resurrection conquered death. Pray in silence, keeping the inner ear of your heart open to hear the Spirit's gentle whisperings...



He Qi, *He is Risen*



Just as we experience the Resurrection and eternal life as mysteries of our faith, so did the followers of Jesus. In John's gospel we read a compelling statement of faith from Martha, a friend and supporter of Jesus. The context is the illness and death of Lazarus, Martha's brother, and her request to Jesus to intervene. When Jesus arrives, there is an exchange between himself and Martha:

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?**" She said to him, "**Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.**"

*John 11: 17-27*

This gospel passage was the topic of the homily by Pope Francis in Saint Peter's Square, on 26 March 2023:

The message (*of this miracle*) is clear: *Jesus gives life* even when it seems that all hope has gone. It happens, at times, to feel hopeless – this has happened to us all – or to meet people who have given up hope; embittered by bad experiences, the wounded heart cannot hope. Because of a painful loss, an illness, a bitter disappointment, a wrong or a betrayal suffered, a grave error committed... they have given up hope. At times we hear some say that "there is nothing more to be done!", and they close the door to all hope. Today's miracle tells us that it is not like that, this is not the end, that in these moments we are not alone. On the contrary, it is precisely in these moments that He comes *closer than ever to restore life to us*. Jesus invites us not to stop believing and hoping, not to let ourselves be crushed by the negative feelings that take away our tears.

**Reflect** on the words of Jesus and Martha in this passage and the insights provided by Pope Francis. How do you understand **hope**? When tough experiences have occurred in your life, how have you drawn on your faith to find the hope to keep believing and keep trusting in God's love of you?

**Catherine McAuley** was a woman of profound **hope**, with confidence in the fruits her efforts would bear during and after her life, and in the promise of eternal life with God after her death. Her **Suscipe** ends with this expression of **hope**...

**Pray the Suscipe in silence**, reading slowly to soak in the meaning of each line. There might be words or phrases you haven't noticed before, so ponder these as you go. And contemplate **Catherine's perspective on hope**, in this life and in eternal life...

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.  
Teach me to cast myself entirely  
into the arms of your loving Providence  
with a lively, unlimited confidence in your  
compassionate, tender pity.  
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,  
That whatever you ordain or permit may be  
acceptable to me.  
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;  
let nothing sadden me but sin,  
**nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the  
possession of You, my God and my all,  
in your everlasting kingdom.**  
Amen.

