

The end of the Journey

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If we understand life as a journey, **the end of this journey is God**. Things are understood from the perspective of the end. The path is only seen at its conclusion. If we speak of "savoring God along the journey of life", we are referring to something that now we only know in hope.

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we fix our gaze on that final horizon and we repeat the cry of the bride who waits, "Come, Lord Jesus!" In every Mass we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes again. (1 Cor. 11:26)

In the Creed, we affirm our faith in the life of the world to come. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that the believer is a foreigner and a stranger on the earth and longs for a better homeland, heaven. (Cf. Heb. 11:13-16) And more than that, "our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20) The heavenly homeland, which we want to reach, is "the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:11)

This encounter is the result of a two-fold movement: **the Lord comes** toward us, we await his return; and **we go** toward the heavenly homeland. The encounter will be the end of the journey. "One day more and our problems will end," wrote the **Good Father** to the sisters in Le Mans (7/8/1828). "Just a bit more than a day and...you will see God".

The Crazy Guy

They tell the story that an announcement was made that the king of a certain country was going to pass through a village. All the neighbors were startled and excited by the news.

Immediately they began to prepare for the king's arrival. Their usual everyday work came to a halt. They cleaned the streets, decorated the square, decked the balconies with flowers and garlands and dressed in their Sunday best. Everything was ready on the day and at the hour he was expected...but the king never arrived. They thought he must have been delayed for some reason and they waited for him the next day, then two days, then a week...But the king did not arrive. Little by little, everyone went back to their usual tasks. As time went by, they forgot their disappointment and stopped talking about it.

Just one of the townsfolk continued acting **as if the king was about to arrive**. His house was still decorated with flowers and garlands. He appeared each morning in his Sunday best and ended each day putting candles in his windows.

Everyone thought he was crazy. Some laughed at him. Others got exasperated with him. "Go back to work like everyone else!" they told him. "I am working," he responded. "What are you doing?" "I'm watching the horizon."

Children asked, "Why does this man live in such a strange way?" The older people felt they had to tell the story of the king who was to come but never arrived. And the crazy guy would add, "and what if he does arrive today or tomorrow?"

Religious

The Christian is that crazy guy. He lives in this world but he knows that the Lord is coming. The vocation of religious life is to exaggerate this sense of expectation. The religious so exaggerates it that he ends up being a strange person. Just by the vows we profess, we don't live like everyone else. It's as if we have the audacity to live now what we will be later. Chastity because "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage"... (Mt. 22:30); poverty because "your heavenly Father feeds them..." (Mt. 6:26); obedience because "not as I will but as you will." (Mt. 26:39)

Our life is a kind of "**eschatological exaggeration**" that points to the ultimate desire of Jesus that the kingdom of God come. When we cease exaggerating and do things like everyone else, perhaps we seem more sensible and practical but then we are no longer like the crazy guy in the story who reminds (himself and others) what is about to happen.

Consequences of hope

If we look at life's journey from the perspective of the end, we make the journey in a different way. "The fact that the future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future." (**Benedict XVI** in *Spe Salvi*, 7) It's what traditional religious language understands by the expression "**sub specie eternitatis**": to look at the present from the perspective of eternity.

In the introduction to the book of **Damien's** letters, which has just been published, David Reid reminds us, "Damien does not ever lose his view of the world *sub specie eternitatis* that is, seeing the present in view of the life to come." Because of that, Damien could face difficult decisions like leaving the land of his birth and his family never to return. And he was able to minister on Molokai as an invitation to eternal joy.

In this time of discernment as we prepare for the General Chapter, the hope given by our faith in the coming of Jesus can give us light in, at least, four different ways.

1. **A Call to Freedom.**

The one who does not fear death is a slave to nothing. We do not have children to protect or a business to preserve. We are well equipped **to risk**. Our priorities are not to insure our health, prolong our life, grow in personal prestige or maintain ourselves in pleasant surroundings. All of that is nothing in comparison with the end of the journey. We can renounce all of it.

2. **Enkindling our Desire.**

"Oh eternal day, day desired, I await you with longing and impatience. In just a bit, love will loose the veil and you will become my salvation." Exclaims Saint **Faustina Kowalska**, speaking of her death and encounter with Jesus, when "the soul will know God in his power and immerse itself totally in his love, and will know that the suffering of exile has passed." (*Diary* 1230). The desire for the **definitive encounter with God** gives a new dimension to other desires that consume our energies and unifies them within us, putting them in their correct place.

3. **Accepting the imperfect.**

The fullness of love and joy is not of this world. Many breakups and offenses in love come from the frustration of not finding on others what we desire. But in order to love truly (because this is what life is all about), we must know **how to be disappointed by another**, so as not to expect of the person what is proper only to God's love (Cf. *Amoris Laetitia* 320). If I recognize that the end of the journey is the immensity of God's love, I will be able to accept, with joy and goodness, the imperfect companion God has placed along my path. And I will be able to accept myself with my contradictions and poverty.

The same thing happens in our relationship with Jesus, which we always inevitably experience in the darkness of faith and the shadow of our sin. As **Charles de Foucauld** said, "the love Jesus has for us has been sufficiently proved to us so that we can believe in it without feeling it: to feel that we love him and he loves us would be heaven; but heaven does not exist down here, except for rare moments and rare exceptions." (Letter of 7/15/1916).

4. **Serving without considering the benefits.**

How will they “pay” us for the services we perform? It’s normal when planning an activity that we look to the consequences in function of the objective we hope to realize. These objectives can bring us “benefits” of the personal kind (feeling useful and acknowledged, developing my capacities...) or institutional (income for the community, attracting vocations, assuring the continuance of a work...)

In the Gospel, there is a beatitude that locates all possible benefits in the beyond. In the scene where Jesus, having been invited to dine in the house of an important Pharisee, tells him, when you give a banquet don’t invite your friends, brothers/sisters, family members or rich neighbors but the poor, disabled, crippled and blind. “You will be blessed because they cannot repay you. **You will be repaid in the resurrection of the just.**” (Lk. 14:14) Jesus advice seems outlandish something like the crazy guy waiting for the arrival of the king. Who does such a thing? Only from the perspective of the resurrection, can we understand surrendering our energies and our love to those who cannot satisfy any of our interests.

This light that hope gives must orient **our discernment**. When it comes to deciding, let us look to the end. What are we disposed to do now, how will it be seen in the perspective of the resurrection? Let us trust in the foolishness and exaggeration that the Spirit can arouse among us.

The certain path is that of love, for that is where we savor God. “**Love** never ends” (1 Cor. 13:8), it remains unto eternity. A demanding and painful love like that of the Sacred Hearts. “In the end, even the ‘yes’ to love is a source of suffering because love always requires expropriations of my ‘I’ in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded.” (*Spe Salvi* 38) For that reason, we cannot be surprised that the fruit of true discernment can frighten us. “*The Gospel terrifies me*’ (Saint Augustine Sermon 339.4)-producing that healthy fear which prevents us from living for ourselves alone and compels us to pass on the hope we hold in common.” (*Spe Salvi* 29).

